Film Quarterly

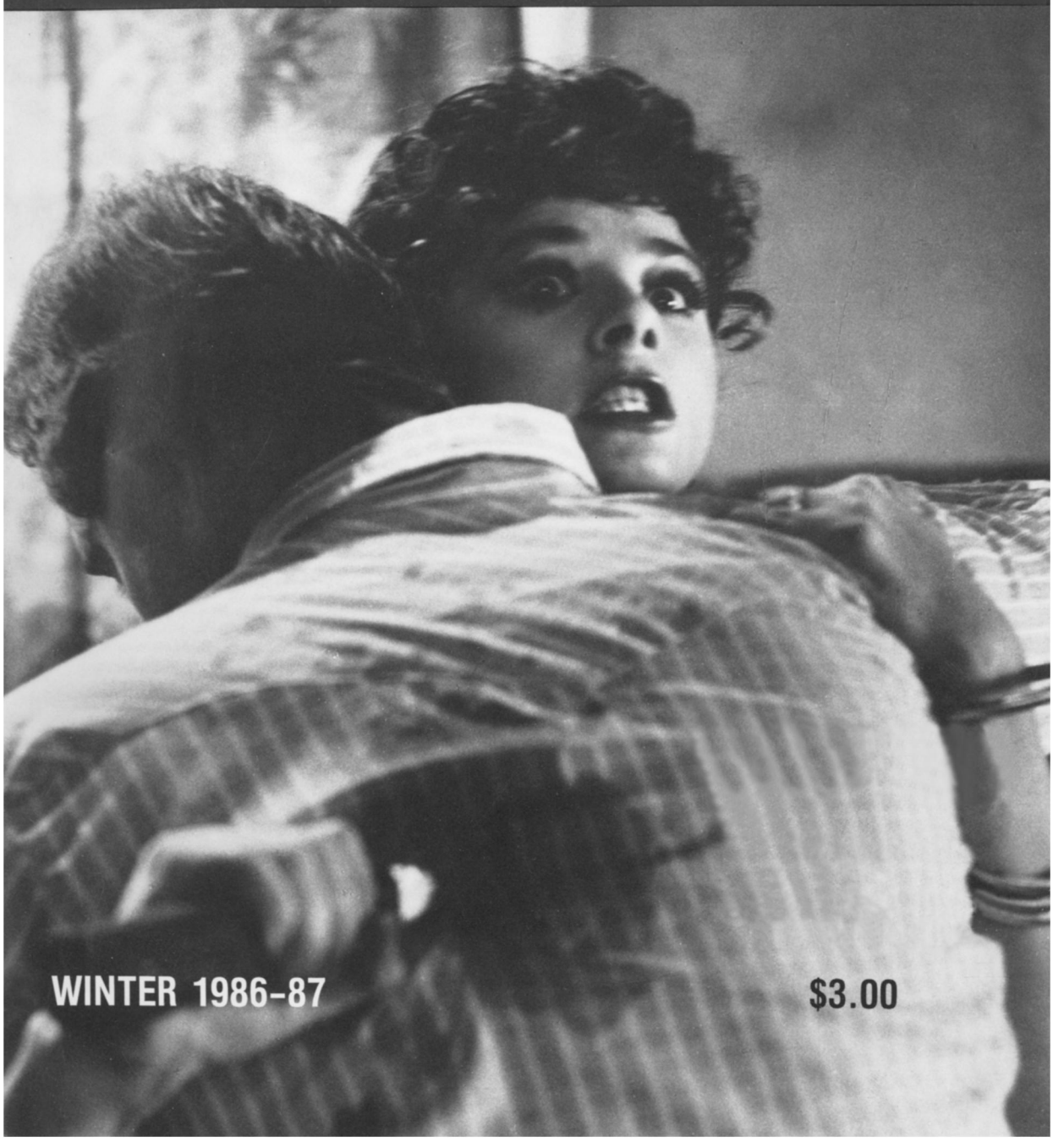
COLORIZATION

VARDA OZU BORAU

CANADIAN FILM

WORKING GIRLS

A GREAT WALL *DIM SUM*



WINTER 1986-87

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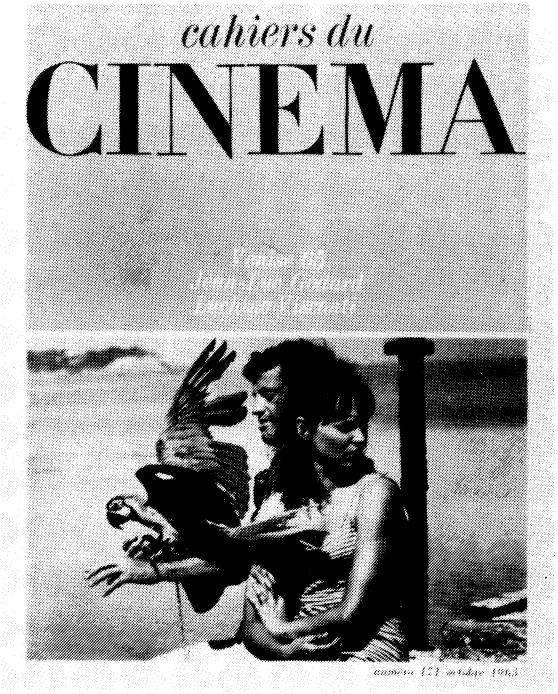

These words inspired a thousand pictures.

Here is the second volume of a collection that the *New York Times Book Review* called "rare and intriguing—the documentary history of an important intellectual shift." Written in the 1960s—when *Cahiers du Cinéma* was at its most influential and controversial—these selections chronicle the significant new directions in filmmaking and film criticism of the decade.

Cahiers du Cinéma

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Colorization

Whatever gamuts American movies have had to run during production, once made they are supposed to be secure. This, naturally, has not been the case. Circulating prints of Chaplin, Keaton, and Laurel and Hardy silent comedies have been corrupted with cutesy, moronic noises. TV stations concoct pan-and-scan prints of wide-screen films, destroying their compositions. Color negatives of the past three decades are subject to fading.

Now our film heritage has a new nemesis: "colorization." Using computers, such entrepreneurs as Ted Turner (who now owns the MGM film library, which he bought as fodder for his Atlanta "super station"), the Hal Roach Company, and Color Systems Technology produce new prints of black-and-white movies with color added.

Various rationales have been advanced for this disgusting cultural vandalism: black-and-white films can't draw huge TV audiences; many video store customers turn up their noses at them; "the kids" aren't interested. Shrugging "philosophically," some apologists point out that the original black-and-white negatives remain untouched. Others would protect the "classics" (these sensitive souls know all the classics intimately, of course) but let the colorizers have, say, Republic Pictures potboiler westerns or Abbott and Costello comedies. Besides, one defense of colorization runs, most American studio pictures were shot in black-and-white only because color was too expensive. The clear implication is that black-and-white is a primitive form of cinematography which "lacks" color, and now these technocrat/hustlers will correct that deficiency. One of them, Earl Glick, the board chairman of Hal Roach Studios, has even had the gall to state that his colorizers have improved Joseph Walker and Joseph Biroc's black-and-white work on *It's a Wonderful Life.*

Color may have been too costly for most American studio movies during the 1930s and 1940s, but once black-and-white photography was chosen, the movies were designed, costumed, and lit accordingly. However, even bothering to refute arguments like these grants them undeserved dignity when in fact they are just contemptuous coverups for the one and only motive behind this rush to colorization: raw greed.

And a rush it is. Already, colorized cassettes of, for example, *Yankee Doodle Dandy, The Maltese Falcon, Topper,* and *It's a Wonderful Life* are not only flooding video stores, they are also inexorably driving the black-and-white originals into the ghettos of occasional museum or revival-theater screenings in cities where such forums exist. If this situation is not reversed, no American black-and-white motion picture may ever again live in regular showings as its makers intended.

Defenders of black-and-white movies are not sitting idle. The Directors Guild has decried colorization on artistic and cultural grounds and has gone to court over the issue of copyright infringement. RKO has done the same in an effort to protect the films produced under its own name. Numerous directors, among them Billy Wilder, John Huston, Fred Zinnemann, Woody Allen, Martin Scorsese, Bertrand Tavernier, Nicholas Meyer, Peter Hyams, Martha Coolidge, and Frank Capra, have expressed outrage. James Stewart has eloquently described the grief he felt when he tried and failed to watch a colorized print of *It's a Wonderful Life* to the end. Having seen a colorized effigy of this movie's climax, I can testify that if this is how the picture is going to be presented from now on, then *It's a Wonderful Life,* in effect, no longer exists; the added color annihilates the mood of elation and reconciliation that

Frank Capra and his collaborators originally sought and achieved.

But talking to the colorizers about things like moods of elation and reconciliation is pointless. Whether you are an individual viewer or a more influential person (say, a buyer or a programmer for television), the urgent message is the same: don't screen or broadcast colorized films, don't rent them, don't buy them, don't watch them. We are dealing with people who are unreachable by cultural, artistic, or social appeals because they don't care about anything except money. Therefore, let us hurt them in the way most painful to their shriveled sensibilities, by depriving them of every dollar that we can. If we do not, their bottomless avarice will deprive us and future generations of infinitely more. —MICHAEL DEMPSEY

[The above views are passionately endorsed by the *Film Quarterly* editorial board.]

Barbara Quart

Agnes Varda: A Conversation

Agnes Varda has been making films for over three decades now, starting out at a time when less than a handful of women were directing. Varda's longevity as a serious film-maker, her capacity for survival, is in itself moving, as other august figures have come and gone, their trajectories played out by death or burnout in one form or another. It is not hard to remember how dazzling *Cleo from 5 to 7* was when it first appeared in 1962, or *Le Bonheur* for that matter in 1965. Varda has come in for her share of criticism but her place in film history is safe. Forerunner of the New Wave, she continues to work and grow, each new film a bold new direction, even though each is a massive enterprise that she must get off the ground, taking on the same miserable struggle for finances however known and respected she is, however glowing the critical reception of such a film as her strong latest one, *Vagabond,* her best film yet (and a commercial success in France).

Varda turns this time to the story of Mona, a young woman vagrant—not an easy subject though a brave one, and in Varda's hands of such interest from start to end that one needn't ask why the film won top honors at the Venice Film Festival. Through flashbacks and documentary-style commentary by those who encounter Mona in her wanderings, *Vagabond* creates the journey that led its central character to a miserable death in a ditch. However, Varda eschews psychological explanations and does not see Mona as a victim, but rather as someone who says no to everything so totally as to look like independence itself. Mona's is an intriguing presence (with an extraordinary performance by Sandrine Bonnaire) that one never gets bored watching, unpredictable, touching in both its tough resourcefulness and its vulnerability. The film's title in French *Sans toit ni loi (Without a Roof or a Law),* alludes first to the pitiful condition of living outdoors in an unbearably cold winter, but alludes second to caring for nothing and nobody—a freedom so total that it is the same as total loneliness, as one of the film's characters says, and can only lead to self-destruction.

The film raises philosophical issues as naturally as it creates ravishing images of great though austere beauty. It also creates through Mona a kind of prism through which to look at a wide range of characters, allowing Varda an unusual, and always multi-layered, perspective on "normality." In speaking with Varda, as in watching the film, one is struck by her refusal to take sides, and by the complexity she creates by laying different attitudes and perceptions side by side—while maintain-

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ing full control of the material. The film brings together what Agnes Varda can do best and shows her to be as skillful and intriguing a director as ever.

Vagabond's opening in New York seemed a fine occasion upon which to talk with Varda, to ask her to reflect about her work, about film and art generally, about the differences between the European film scene and our own, about feminism, as well as about the making of *Vagabond*. Habituated as we are to a film industry that is all compromise, for which the box office is almost always the central concern, to hear a director speak out of a larger vision of film-making, a vision she has struggled for all these years, in film after film, is an important reminder of what the art of film is all about.

Varda began our talk by asking where my "head is at," so she would know how to gear her remarks. I told her I am interested in women directors. The interview was conducted in English.

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AGNES VARDA: I have not seen a woman director in America that I could speak to as I can speak to European women directors—to von Trotta, to Chantal Akerman. They do what they can but I never spoke with an American woman director who had thought about what is the cinematic writing, and where are the goals of what I call in French *cinécriture,* which means cinematic writing. Specifically that. Not illustrating a screenplay, not adopting a novel, not getting the gags of a good play, not any of this. I have fought so much since I started, since *La Pointe Courte,* for something that comes from emotion, from visual emotion, sound emotion, feeling, and finding a shape for that, and a shape which has to do with cinema and nothing else. That conversation I almost never have had here. Either the talk goes to subject, like woman subject; or screenplay, the story. Is it a good story or a bad story, it's a *wonderful* story—always that. And then what?

Do you think the problem is the industry here?

I think it's the industry. And also the way people are taught at school makes them believe that a good story is a strong film, a strong screenplay is a good film. What the cinema has to deal with is the way of narrating, and not the story. That's what makes Murnau big and Orson Welles and Bresson and Godard and whoever you take, that we respect, Cassavetes. It is the way that they decide to tell a story or a non-story. So that makes it very difficult sometimes here. It is perhaps confusing that when I did *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* as a feminist story, I had to go more through the story and follow the story, even though the narration was up and down. But most of my films—if we get that one slightly out of the way because it was somewhat differently made—are very very thin stories. My work is how I use it. If you tell the story of *Citizen Kane* it is not much of a story. An old rich mogul man is dead. He said a word we don't understand. We don't discover so much, just some pieces of his life and finally it is just a sled. Is that a story? It is not much. So what makes *Citizen Kane* so interesting is the way he told us about the man—intriguing us about what people think about him. And what is good about Murnau is the way the tension grows, but no story almost.

I don't know if directors can survive that way here with that mentality. The few directors here who think that way have had trouble surviving. You were talking about visual imagination. Vagabond *was so beautiful to watch, along with the whole sense of an exploration.*

I agree with the word "exploration." I didn't make it as a beautiful film to watch.

It doesn't feel decorative-beautiful, it seems totally integrated, but the images you make are incredible to look at.

They are strong, they are more strong than beautiful. Especially that subject which is dying from the cold, has to deal with being outside and homeless, and the landscapes—which I know because it is the area where I was raised—the landscapes of that part of France in winter are great, they are strong, they are hostile. Just to watch the remainings of the vines, the black things which stay there—the cep. They make the wine and then they cut the vine (what we see in the film), and this dark mini-tree remains—like a bonsai. And these little pieces of dark black in a huge landscape make the landscape very strong. I love it.

Not just the landscape, a window with people and goats, even what you do with a wall.

There are goats all over the world, there are

Sandrine Bonnaire and Agnes Varda, star and director of VAGABOND

shepherds all over the world.

But what you do with them.

This has to go somewhere. The technical and frames are only the means to go through what has to be felt. And it deals with strong feelings. And that's why I put her dead at the beginning of the film—we discover her dead. We're not telling the story of that girl so people will think, "Maybe they'll save her." It's clear that she died. Alone in a ditch, frozen, which is an awful death. And the way she looks—she's a mess—she's the colors of the ditch almost, like the color of a gun. The way the story is told is not to be pitiful, not for understanding, that is not what it's about. It's about what it is to be so much in the "no" situation—she says no all the time—and I don't know why she ended up on the road and saying no. But I like to see how her "no" opposed to the society gets reactions in such different ways according to who is meeting her. So by trying to capture more or less, less rather than more, who she was and what was in her mind, since we go through other people's reactions, we discover more about them than about her.

I like the openness of it and the contradictions, but it doesn't feel confused, it feels totally in control, but open and rich.

And rich because there is no way to say "This is good, this is bad, this is mean, this is nice." So obviously we got to the point where that *structure* of *portrait* is more important than knowing did she have a bad father who beat her, did she have a lover, did she escape from a jail, or who knows!

You didn't want to deal with her as pathological.

No, not even with psychology. Not even with social-psychology.

Why?

Because I'm interested in now and here.

Do you see her as making a philosophical choice?

Certainly not. She doesn't look to have a philosophical head to me. The shepherd made that kind of choice, but that was in '68, or in the 70s.

Was he really who he says he was—did you find someone who lived that life?

Yes. But I made his lines for him, because he didn't want to speak for himself. Like he

would have refused to make a documentary. When I made it clear that it was a fictional film, then he said, "Well, if you write my lines then I'm acting—then I'm being paid, and I'm acting."

Do you see the film as about the late '60s, what has happened to the '60s mentality, as Flora Lewis wrote about the film in the New York Times*?*

Certainly not. Anyway, I found that article very confused.

You have talked about having a new experience with feminism in the early '70s.

What do you mean, "a new experience"? I've been a feminist since I was nineteen years old, fighting for serious rights, for the same wages, for contraception. I started early, early, really.

I'm surprised because I had the sense that you had a change of vision in the early '70s and through the '70s.

No, what happened was that there was a huge number of feminist women around and sometimes they used me, sometimes they pushed me away, sometimes they manipulated my work so it would be feminist or not. Some radical feminists hated my work, some feminists loved it—I was like a ping-pong ball. But in terms of real life simple things, and not theoretical—because I never was, never read anything about feminists—all these people, they knew about Babel and Engels, which I came to know very late. But I was naturally involved in fighting whatever was prejudicial to women. So we started in France—I'm speaking about '48, '49, '50—going with other groups to the government, making petitions. I was there, helping women with that, and trusting women and working with them, giving them confidence and pushing them to be technicians—way ahead of others.

How did you have the courage to do it yourself?

There is no courage there, I really believe it is natural. I had no reason to believe that my brothers were better. They were okay, but I didn't see anything that I didn't have which could make me do less than what they could do. Well, I hated war, it was clear that I wouldn't use weapons. I hated violence right away, I found it stupid mostly. And I hated a certain kind of stupidity which is related to power, showing the power, showing the strength. And using violence against other people disgusts me. But not only against women, against other people, against Africans, against Vietnamese, against whatever. The Algerian War was a great drama. But I was mostly an artist, let's put it that way. I was very much involved with taking pictures, using my eyes like mad, discovering things, but not just traveling like a tourist, I never was that.

Were you conscious of yourself as alone among film-makers as a woman?

I was not a film-maker even to start with but a photographer. And when I started my first film I was alone for sure as a woman, but I didn't see myself as a woman, a courageous woman, I saw myself as a courageous artist, a film-maker, because nobody was making films at my age at the time—men or women. The young New Wave came later. So when I did my first feature-length film in '54, at that time nobody young was making films. Orson Welles maybe had done that here. But in France at the time you had to be third assistant, then second assistant, then first assistant for years, and then you would have a chance to direct after age 45. That was more or less the way it was done. Some people started earlier, some artists like Jean Gremillon, but it was not in the hands of youth—writing a film and doing it like this. What I started was, not so much to be young, but deciding that a film should follow inspiration and not, again, the story, the screenplay. My first film was a very strange construction. Since you teach literature, you know about *Wild Palms,* Faulkner?

Yes.

This is the book that made me think a lot about what narration is because I was so impressed that the two stories in *Wild Palms* never meet. One story is about two men escaping from a penitentiary in a flood, the other is about a couple with a difficult love story. It moves back and forth.

Vagabond *still does that, doesn't it? move back and forth.*

No, no, I'm sorry. *Vagabond* is really constructed about different people looking at Mona—like building together an impossible portrait of Mona. This is not back and forth. *Wild Palms* is very precisely one chapter about the escape, one about the couple. So in my

first film, one chapter—if I call that a chapter —was a couple discussing their love, a kind of failed love after five years; and then there was a village trying to get themselves together as a union—fishermen—in a very neorealistic way. So you went from the village to the couple and they would never meet. And this was very daring. This came from Faulkner because I noticed—not that I liked the book so much, this is not the point—I was trying to notice the effect of that narration on me. And how it works is that you get nervous, because you want to go to the second story. So I read it once like it is, first chapter A, then B, A, B. Then I got so nervous I read all the As together, jumping a chapter to get the story. Then I read the other one, all the Bs. Then I understood I was stupid. Then I went back to read it the way it is, which includes disturbance, it includes being frustrated from the narration.

Because so many of your films are no longer available here, the film that is very familiar to me because I saw it recently is Les Créatures *and you do interesting things with narration there too.*

This is what cinema is all about. Images, sound, whatever, are what we use to construct a way which is cinema, which is supposed to produce effects, not only in our eyes and ears, but in our "mental" movie theater in which image and sound already are there. There is a kind of on-going movie all the time, in which the movie that we see comes in and mixes, and the perception of all these images and sound proposed to us in a typical film narration piles up in our memory with other images, other associations of images, other films, but other mental images that we have, they preexist. So a new image in a film titillates or excites another mental image already there or emotions that we have, so when you propose something to watch and hear, it goes, it works. It's like we have sleeping emotions in us all the time, half-sleeping, so one specific image or the combination of one image and sound, or the way of putting things together, like two images one after another, what we call montage, editing—these things ring a bell. These half-asleep feelings just wake up because of that—that is what it is about. This is not to make a film and say, "Okay, let's get a deal, let's tell the story, let's have a good actress, good-bye, not bad," and we go home and we eat. What I am dealing with is the effects, the perception, and the subsidiary effects of my work as proposals, as an open field, so that you can get there things you always wanted to feel and maybe didn't know how to express, imagine, watch, observe, whatever. This is so far away from the strong screenplay, the beautiful movie, etc., that sometimes I don't know what I should discuss. You understand, this is really fighting for that "Seventh Art" which is making films.

That's why your work has a dimension that none of these other people's do. There's a largeness of vision about your work.

It is a question of our minds. What culture deals with is not that we have to learn to see all the Italian painting, all the Spanish painting, this is piling up information about culture. But what culture means is that we are able to associate real things, nature, paintings we have seen, music we have heard, a book we have read, a film we saw, with our real life, our emotional life, which means a lot.

To get back to women, I found the relationship between the tree expert in the film and Mona quite moving.

Well, I have mixed feelings about it. It is written as mixed feelings. It is nice and also very different, one character is like a WASP and she has knowledge and she's a teacher and she's also a tree scientist and she's clean and she has a bathroom and she has friends and she has nail polish and she's got a car, okay. And the other one is homeless and dirty, knows nothing, and stupid, and stubborn and all that. She picks her up like this, out of nothing. What I like about the teacher, she has one quality that I gave her, which is just to be natural. She naturally suffers from the stink, she naturally overcomes it, because in a way she naturally speaks with that young outlaw runaway. She's the only one relating naturally, asking natural questions, whatever is the answer. Proposing food, but to eat it together.

There's a fine intimacy that you create.

I wouldn't call it intimacy. What is intimacy? The other one doesn't even say "Are you okay? Are you in good health? Do you have kids? You work?" The young one never asks a question, she's not interested in anything. I would say that the other one, because of her academic background, is sort of used to ask questions and to try to find the mind

VAGABOND

of where the other one is. It's almost professional.

You think so? It's more human to me.

It is human, but she's also got the culture to ask the questions, and the right ones. But she's totally humanized. I like the way she buys these little cookies, and they eat them together and she says let's have coffee. She knows she won't take the girl home, so she buys her food, she gives her money, and she says bye-bye. That's what I call natural, she already has the situation in hand. She won't adopt the girl. What would you say, would you take her home?

Did you ever have a similar experience in your own life?

I had a thousand experiences of that kind—with men and women I picked up on the road, and took home also. Sometimes I'd take them home, sometimes I didn't. I just follow what is there at the time. I don't have any kind of rule about that.

Why were you drawn to that?

I always picked up people. I remember once in California I picked up a man—I was with my daughter at the time, she was about eleven—and he said, "Do you mind if I lie down in the back of the car?" I said, "Lie down, sleep." Then we arrived where we were going, and I said, "We are arriving, so we'll drop you off," and he said, "No, I'd rather stay here." We said, "We have to go and we can't leave you in the car." And he said, "Well, I don't want to go, I feel so good in your car, I want to sleep here." And I thought, what are we going to do, this huge man, one of those vagrants, and I didn't know what to do, he looked strong and maybe he was sick. I started to be afraid he was an addict on drugs or something. You can be in a situation when you can no longer make it nice and cool. I always did that. I've always been interested in people who have nothing because whatever you do they'll take it—this I found out very easily. You give them money, they'll take it, you give them food, they'll take it, you give them board, they'll take it. They don't ask you, they don't speak to you, they don't want you, they don't like you—they just need.

It's so interesting to me that you see them with all their flaws, that you're willing to be generous though you see them for what they are.

I don't do it so they love me. They won't. They don't need my love or to love me. Recently we found one on the road when we were making the film already and she stayed with us, with the crew. We gave her board and food for a little while. She would ask for grass or money or food, but she never asked anybody something that you would relate to, not me or another. She got whatever she could out of us, out of me—and then she went.

Did you mean the maid who feels envious of the girl to be silly? The woman who keeps talking as if she envies Mona's freedom and her lover.

Innocent—but innocent in a stupid way, stupid with her lover, stupid even with her boss. By seeing Mona with her boss, with the old lady, we understand that she could have another relationship. Nobody obliges her to play the maid that much. We find out that Mona wears the same housecoat and ends up sitting on the couch and enjoying herself drinking and laughing. Why shouldn't Yolanda do that and say, "You're so alone, let's have a drink and play cards." I guess the old lady would love that.

You have such strong sympathy for the working person but you see her limits very strongly and clearly. I'd also like to ask, is there anything that binds your women together or even your films together? I mean, there are certain women directors, like von Trotta, who are obsessional—they go back and back over the same themes, the same kind of characters.

Terrorists, you mean?

Sisters, two women together, obsessively.

I try to think about your women characters and they seem so different from one another.

Well, they have one thing in common too—women and men characters. I'm interested in contradiction—the inner contradiction—which makes everybody three persons at the same time, everybody is able to be so different from one moment to another, from one feeling to another. Even *Cleo from 5 to 7,* there was a contradiction between the objective time, which is 5:05, 5:10, 5:15, and what I call subjective time—that we feel so different when we have a good time, it lasts so little, and when we wait for something, it's endless. So that different and subjective way of perceiving the time made the film a very contradictory film. What I always had was two subjects in one, like one sings, the other doesn't. In the first film I spoke about, the village and the couple are two entities you can't put together, collective life and private life. You can understand a union problem, and you can understand your own private life, but it's so difficult to perceive your private life in the middle of the union problem. And my two films about Los Angeles, *Murs Murs* and *Documenteur*—one is about Los Angeles, a portrait of the city through what is shown in the street, palm trees and sun and all these murals and everybody expressing themselves. And then the second film, which is like the shadow of the first one, which is what you don't see in Los Angeles, the nowhere city inside the city. And that was again my contradictory perceptions of the same city. A flamboyant place, and a totally dark end of the end of the end of the West scene. These two films were supposed to go together. So I would say the cinematic ability to perceive the contradictions at the same time has been the main element in my work. With Mona, I would say it's our society's contradictions that come out very clearly. We have all these social ideas that we should have night shelters, Salvation Army, welfare, charity, to help out other people, but we don't know what to do when people don't want to be helped. There is a contradiction in our indifference and caring at the same time. So to get back to that woman, she seems to carry that very naturally, the ability of being naturally involved, slightly generous but with the exact limit of our society, which is not more than that little

Sandrine Bonnaire and Macha Meril: VAGABOND

bit. And coming back to her house, to her job, to her bathroom, she gets away quite okay, some money, some food, bye-bye. But later on she has a guilty feeling that she should, she could, have done more. To tell the truth I don't know what more she could have done. I don't think she was ready to adopt that vagrant—who, by the way, would not have been pleased to be adopted. So sometimes a film pushes us toward the wall where we have to face the limits of our vague understanding, vague generosity and vague not understanding what it's all about. So I ended up structuring the film in the shape of an impossible portrait.

You've never been interested in putting a woman like yourself in one of your films?

What is a woman like myself?

I don't know but not the wife in Les Créatures *unless it's a part of yourself, some domestic part of yourself.*

Well, look, I can see myself as a contradiction. I'm a grandmother but I'm also a very young director, in the meaning that I really fight for the same struggle that I have always been fighting, which is cinematic independence, cinematic vision, which is related to keeping a very alive mind about making film.

I'm astonished by how you keep breaking new ground.

That's what I'm saying because I'm getting old also.

You seem to have amazing energy. That must be how you do it.

Well, I'm losing my energy, little by little. I'll be dead soon. But the way I see my work is that I respect that work. Not in the meaning that I praise my work, but in the meaning

that this is the work which is worth fighting for so much, being out of money, out of power, out of consideration, out for a while because people don't want me. They don't want me to make these films. They don't give me the money, even though they respect my finished work.

One Sings *must have turned that around.*

This one is making a big amount of money in France. We reach a million people already. But what it does is more important than how much money it makes and if we will reimburse —which it will—because I borrowed, I took risks like nobody takes here.

Did you? did you have to? because I would think that One Sings *would have done very well in the box office.*

It did. But with each film I have to fight like a tiger. They don't want me.

With everything you've done? With the size of your achievement?

Oh, I'm a perfect cultural gadget, they have me in all libraries and cinémathèques. I'll be unforgotten. But they don't want me to make films.

Why? France the great film center?

But still they do films to make money. Very few people are involved in creating that pile of pieces of films as you do paintings. I make shorts sometimes just to keep alive in my own research. You know, you saw *Ulysses,* who would give money for that? There is no market for shorts, very strange.

There seem to be many younger women directors in France now, people starting out, but they seem quite commercial.

Oh, it's everywhere in the world, young men and young women, most of them look for money and fame. They make deals and become part of this stream of commercial films and it's fine if it fits them. If they like that, fine. We need products anyway. We know we cannot feed the need with only these research films or special films.

With art, you mean?

But my last film *Vagabond*—I was amazed that I did it with no compromising at all with my way of working. And so many people were touched and intrigued by the film. The film questions people, but not with guilt. I don't judge so it's not saying you should see the film, because shame on you, you don't give money to your neighbor. Nothing to do with that. I make it clear that not only nobody's perfect, but nobody's totally bad and nobody's totally good, nobody's generous really, nobody's mean really. They all do their way. The shepherd gives her a whole lot, and he gives her a piece of land if she wants to raise potatoes, but then he's the worst judge of all because he wants to be marginal but in *his* way. He doesn't accept other people. He's the one who condemns her.

You feel that harshly toward him?

Yes, because he says errancy is wrong. How does he know what's good and bad? He just knows about his goats and his wife. So the film is really about tolerance also. How with tolerance you can accept other ways of existing which are so difficult to tolerate, difficult for me, difficult for everybody. And the film is made in such a way that it's more interesting because it's a woman. Because the same case could be a man in a way. But by making it a woman we add a lot of questions there—a different kind of solitude, but also a woman alone is a sexual prey, and for half the people a woman is alone because she didn't find the right man. So the film shows that she's not looking for a man, even though when she has them she can drop them like this, even in a bitchy way—as with the man she is with in the castle, and she leaves him hurt. She's mean, she's selfish. The Tunisian gives her an ability to work on something, he's not judging that she's lazy, she doesn't do a thing at home. He seems to accept her as she is. But then the group cannot accept that. And then you see he's the victim of a group. He can't even hold his own opinion. So all these contradictions that I see all the time are what make me be touched—not only her dying from the cold, and a lonely frozen death is an awful one—but also all these contradictions that we can't stand and I can't stand. And I try to give a shape to it, not to make people cry but to give a shape to it that looks like a film.

BRENDA BOLLAG

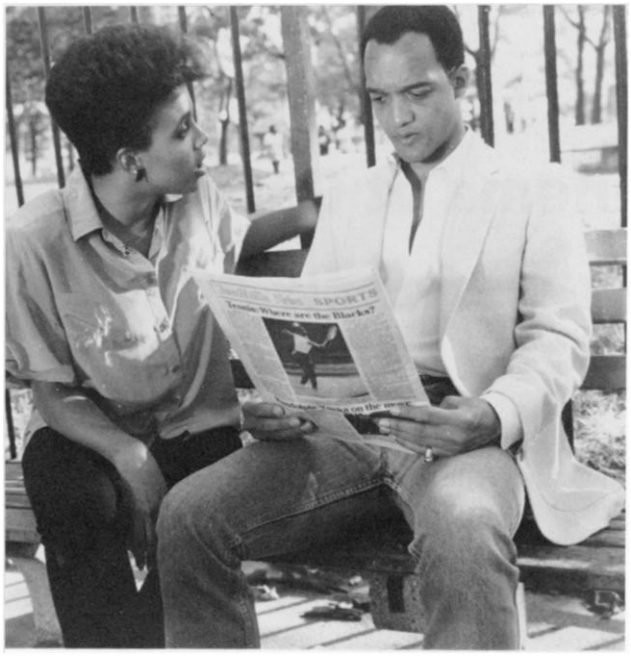
NY Independent Cinema at Cannes: Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law* and Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*

Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law,* presented in the official selection at the Cannes Film Festival of 1986, and Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It,* presented in the "Quinzaine des réalisateurs" ("Directors' Fortnight") section, show a number of immediately striking similarities: highly luminous black-and-white photography, an unconventional approach to narrative structure, and a firm commitment to the representation of off-beat life-styles and personalities.

Within the first few minutes of each, we are shown the face of a beautiful sleeping black woman shot from an intriguingly peculiar angle. In *Down by Law,* the (fairly minor) character to whom the face belongs is Bobbie (Billie Neal), a sharp-mouthed prostitute working for Jack (John Lurie), small-time New Orleans pimp and gambler. Jack, who responds calmly to the contemptuous criticism Bobbie heaps on him with the remark, "Baby, you sure how how to talk," will shortly wind up in the Orleans Parish Prison where he makes the acquaintance of Zack (Tom Waits), a burned-out disc jockey, and Roberto (or "'Bob' itsa the same thing") (Roberto Benigni), a recent immigrant from Italy. The adventures of this threesome—intra-muros and extra-muros—occupy the major part of the film. Except during the opening and closing segments of the film, we are nearly always alone with Jack, Zack and Bob, first in their prison cell, and then in the Louisiana swamplands once they have broken out.

The point of departure for the construction of *Down by Law* would seem to have been the questions, Where does a story come from? How does a film-maker isolate the elements of a narrative from the vast and heterogeneous assemblage of material to which the camera gives him access? The creation of a fictional universe calls first of all for the establishment of a place: thus the film opens with a brief and excellent series of rapid lateral travellings, low-angled as the buildings of old New Orleans—perched precariously against a sky heavy with imminent drama—glide by, and then at street-level while the neighborhood, seen as if through the frame of a car window, continues to stream past. Some music, some smooth motion, some black-and-white urban imagery, and within the film's first few moments, Jarmusch has us already installed in a world throbbing with the promise of a thousand stories. ("La ville, c'est la fiction," Godard tells us in his short film *Lettre à Freddy Buache à propos d'un court-métrage sur la ville de Lausanne* [1982], ". . . c'est la nécessité de la fiction.") A sampling of these follows: little, barely connected dramatic episodes, each of which might have been developed into a major strand of the story. Bobbie, for example, with her spirited sarcasm, her good looks and her status as Jack's bottom-woman, might have served as a convenient means for advancing the film's plot. But hers is one of the stories that Jarmusch decides not to tell us; after a single episode in the beginning, she disappears from the film. What Jarmusch does with such fragments in no way resembles the intricate interweaving of intersecting story lines which can be found in films such as Ioselliani's *Les favoris de la lune* (1983); rather, he extracts from their infinitely complex potential the simplest of situations. Jack, Zack and Bob, drawn out of their disparate, barely overlapping universes by a classically outlandish but convincing set of circumstances, travel

*Spike Lee tells me that the expression "down by law" refers to "someone you can really count on," using "down" in a sense reminiscent of "he's really down" = "he's a good person" (especially, one who's ready to participate in anything).



Tracy Camila Johns and Redmond Hicks in SHE'S GOTTA HAVE IT

a length of story line together, and then go their separate ways as the film comes to a close.

The sleeping face of *She's Gotta Have It*'s opening belongs to Nola Darling, played by Tracy Camila Johns, upon whom Lee bet heavily and won. Her face in all its changes—and the mind and body which go with it—constitute the pivot around which the film's entire action revolves and she and Lee succeed in creating a character who is so singularly rich and appealing that, despite her nearly constant presence on the screen, we never reach a point of saturation; she remains interesting throughout. Nola Darling's relationships with her three male lovers, one lesbian friend, and a former roommate could have served as the basis for a fast-paced, action-packed story of love and lust in Brooklyn. But they do not. Lee uses them rather as points of access to that segment of the (fictional) world that is Nola. Clearly, there is for him no "right" way of seeing her, no "correct" interpretation of her actions. As he has Nola herself tell us, all those people who *think* they know her do in fact know some part of her. Thus, the character of Nola is presented to us as the sum of a number of different points of view about her, among which the most important is her own.

Much closer in its structure to Eric Mitchell's unjustly ignored *The Way It Is or Eurydice of the Avenues* (1983) than to the films of Jarmusch, *She's Gotta Have It* mixes dramatic episodes with elements normally associated with non-fiction film. Characters often look directly into the camera, for example, and speak as if responding to the questions of an interviewer.

Quite obviously, traditional modes of narrative development are rejected by both Jarmusch and Lee. Yet their films remain unequivocally within the realm of narrative fiction film. Their goal is not to destroy the story, but to construct it differently ("C'est une loi du cinéma," the scriptgirl tells the director in Godard's *Passion* [1981], "il y a une histoire et il faut la suivre.") Thus, while the standard linear elaboration of a single well-made plot line is discarded, heavy emphasis on the construction of a small number of engrossing, psychologically believable characters is retained. The characters of both films are touching and free-spirited, winning and funny. However, there is a curious difference between them. Jarmusch's characters (of whom the three principal ones are white and several of the secondary ones black) are outsiders in the deepest sense of the word. They bring to mind not the mildly marginal misfits of *Stranger than Paradise,* but characters like Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo) in Godard's *A bout de souffle* (1959). Like him, they have no future and live in an acute state of lawlessness; like him, they are involved in activities such as gambling, prostitution and homicide and are careening "vers la précipice à 100 à l'heure." When compared to them, the characters of *She's Gotta Have It* (all of whom are black) appear to be remarkably integrated. We never see them handling guns or languishing in prison. They are not on the run from the police and most of them even seem to have jobs: Nola is a commercial artist, her father and ex-roommate are musicians. Among her suitors, Greer Childs (John Terrell) is a successful male model; the profession of Jamie Overstreet (Redmond Hicks) is never specified, but he does not seem to be unemployed. Only Mars Blackman (played by Spike Lee himself), who wears fifty-dollar sneakers although he hasn't had a job in two years, seems to have problems in this department. The values and world views of mainstream America are as foreign to them as they are to

Roberto Benigni, Nicoletta Braschi, Tom Waits, and John Lurie in DOWN BY LAW

Jarmusch's romantically doomed rebels. But unlike the latter, Lee's characters seem to have succeeded in carving out a small breathing space for themselves in white America. They have not "sold out" or been taken in by false dreams of justice and equality. But perhaps they are just as happy to leave high-styled self-destructive rebellion to characters like Jack and Zack. Perhaps they have known too many martyrs to take the business of rebellion as a game. "Yeah," says Blackman/Lee when Nola reminds him that May 19th is Malcolm X's birthday, "he was down by law."

MAURICE YACOWAR

The Canadian as Ethnic Minority

To function as an ethnic minority in North American cinema, you don't have to be Jewish—or black, grey, or a vampire. It's enough to be a Canadian—but only in Canada. The Canadian film experience proves that a whole nation can feel itself a silenced, even invisible, Outsider in its own home. Canadian film shows all the characteristics of the American ethnic minority film. The central characters are identifiably outside the cultural mainstream. They look, sound, and act different from the traditional norms. Furthermore, the audience is expected to relish these differences. Also, whatever the particular plot, there is an implicit tension between the central characters and the society from which they are thus set apart. These characters' heroism and popularity carry an additional value of success in the

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larger culture, but having reaffirmed the minority's self and resisted the temptations of assimilation.

Canadian film is certainly a stranger in its own land. This is due equally to its geographical proximity to the United States and to its history of subordination to the American media industries. Sixty years ago David Selznick's father Lewis avowed that "If Canadian stories are worth making into films, companies will be sent into Canada to make them." Little wonder that Norma Shearer left Montreal, Mary Pickford Toronto, Louis B. Mayer Saint John, Yvonne de Carlo Vancouver, Fay Wray Cardston and Rod Cameron Calgary. And so it goes: they still do (Saul Rubinek, Martin Short, John Candy, Helen Shaver . . .). In the 1940s the Canadian government decided to act upon the estimated $20,000,000 that Canada was losing to American film companies each year. However, it was appeased by Hollywood's promise to work Canadian references into American films, in order to promote tourism. That is why in Anthony Mann's otherwise unornithological *Bend of the River* the James Stewart character pauses to reflect: "Those are red-wing orioles from Canada." And why generations of outlaws would flee to Canada, the tourists presumably to follow. Later initiatives to divert foreign film earnings into Canadian production or to establish modest quotas for film imports have buckled before threats of retaliation. (Trade pacts might or might not be renegotiated, the outlaws might head south, etc.) As a consequence, the Canadian's media experience remains largely American.[1]

Some statistics may suggest the extremity of this situation. In 1982 foreign-controlled (which is to say largely American) film and video distribution companies accounted for 73% of Canada's gross revenues ($209,000,000). Of the $170,500,000 paid out in royalties, rentals and commissions, 95% ($163,000,000) was paid out to foreign-controlled distribution companies. Foreign dominance is equally complete in television. Less than 3% of Canadian prime-time television features Canadian drama and sitcoms. But 56% is American and 78% is foreign. Across the whole broadcast day only 1.5% of all televised hours is Canadian. Canadians can even see more hours of American newscasts than Canadian, despite Canada's excellent reputation in news journalism. And so on: 75% of book sales are imported titles, 82% of recording sales (and that by only 10 foreign companies).

Canadian culture is foreign-dominated in noneconomic terms as well. So long have the Canadian media been permeated with American stars, styles and genres, that anything that is distinctly, self-respectingly Canadian—such as Joyce Wieland's feature film *The Far Shore* —seems foreign at home. Denied wide distribution, it even fails to receive the support of the critical and academic community. The typical Canadian success seems homey: the glamor of stardom and celebrity are reserved for the Americans that Canadians assume are their stars too. In effect, a national psyche is dreaming someone else's dreams. For the Canadian performer, success in the United States is mandatory for stardom in Canada. The very phrase "Canadian star" seems to be a contradiction in terms, like "jumbo shrimp" or "common sense." Major Canadian feature films still import the dubious box-office security of second-line American "stars." And so it came to pass that the American heart-throb Robbie Benson was cast as an Indian hero in *Running Brave,* even though that film was financed by an Alberta Indian band in an effort to enhance Indian pride. The great Canadian oarsman, Ned Hanlon, was recently portrayed by yet another minor luminary from the States, Nicholas Gage, in *The Boy in Blue.* A role that could have made a new Canadian star supported a fading import. Neither film was notably enhanced by this internationalism.

This exercise in national self-denial goes further than its lead casting. The typical English-Canadian film will court American viewers by declaring the Toronto setting to be New York or Dallas, by changing all the car license plates (or, as in *One Magic Christmas,* covering the plates in snow and sprinkling about US college sweatshirts), by working in a gratuitous reference to "the president" where "the prime minister" might be, by arraying gumshoes against police "lootenants" (Canadians lean to the left-tenancy), or—the sure sign of an English-Canadian film in recent years—by flashing the American flag for no apparent reason within the first two minutes. In shooting the current TV crime series, "Night Heat,"

all the distinctive Toronto landmarks are religiously evaded so that the setting will seem American. For the same purpose, Toronto's notoriously clean streets are strewn with garbage before a scene is shot. (The zealous city cleaners have been known to ruin a setup during a coffee-break.)

Here we have a national culture doing what minority actors used to do in order to "pass." These operations in self-denial are equivalent to the traditional bobbing of the nose or the name. Canadian films are made to look American. As a result, only American-looking films are shown outside the large Canadian cities. A small Canadian center will see the latest Chuck Norris film (and everything worse) but can rest secure that it will not be assailed by a Canadian film except perhaps on television—where it will be validated by American commercials. In most countries a native film is released; in Canada one occasionally escapes. Although Canada has produced from 30 to 80 features a year in the last decade, it is estimated that Canadian films get only 2% of the screen time in their own country. As a result, a Canadian film seems strange unless it strains to seem American. The self-fulfilling prophecy in self-denial persists. Sad to say, these assimilation strategies, intended to guarantee commercial success, have often succeeded, as in the case of *Animal House, Meatballs, Porky's,* all the *Police Academies,* and their unfortunate spawn, all of which had Canadian talent and money but not character.

The eagerness to seem American permeates even the ceremony established to celebrate the best of Canadian films, the annual Genie Awards. Canada has its very own, distinctive Hollywooden "Academy" to award its very own, distinctive trophy, a gutted and castrated Oscar named Genie. Stars like Mary Steenburgen or rediscovered Canadians like Glenn Ford are imported or exhumed to add their luster to the event. Here is Michael Dorland's closing description of the telecast of the 1985 ceremony:

> Fully in the spirit of the evening—its grotesque finale—as the names of presenters, CBC program hosts, federal government bureaucrats and the like were called out, all joined around a dancing figure of Mickey Mouse to sing a rousing chorus from the American musical *South Pacific* and thus crowned a simply perfect evening in celebration of Canadian film. . . . The "Canadian" film industry has at last found for itself the appropriate "international" totem: not just a mouse, but an American caricature.[2]

Of course the artistic successes have been works of distinctive integrity, that have to their own selves been true. As they prove, in the wasteland of self-denying mainstream Canadian cinema there are three oases. One is the National Film Board, world-famous for its traditions in documentary and animation, but also responsible for the sporadic production of quality fiction features. Across Canada there are also pockets of independent filmmakers, who on shoestring budgets sustain the soul of personal film-making. Their strength usually lies in their assertion of regional subjects and style. The fertility of regional cinema may range from a major feature like Gordon Pinsent's *The Rowdyman* (1972) to the lower-budget models of William MacGillivray, *Aerial View* (1978) and *Stations* (1983), all solid works rooted in the specifics of the Atlantic Canadian character and concerns. Finally, there is the cinema of Québec, the most assertive region in Canada. Its separate language has protected it against American dominance. In 1984 US releases accounted for 95% of the rentals in English Canada, but only 65% in Québec. More importantly, perhaps, their passionate political agenda has given Québec artists a high purpose lost to the commercial cinema of English Canada, but a model to the awakening regions.

My present purpose is to survey the true Canadian film to demonstrate its "ethnic" resistance against assimilation. Canada's fatal abandonment to American mythology is the implicit subject of Peter Pearson's excellent 1973 feature, *Paperback Hero.* Import Keir Dullea stars as Rick Dillon, a rowdy in a small prairie town, who prolongs his immaturity by cultivating two personae. One is the Canadian model of a hockey star. The other is the American image of the gunslinger, Marshal Dillon. Both images are laughably incongruous in the small-town folksy setting. When the disappointments of his real situation overwhelm him, Dillon beats a fatal retreat to his American role, and is gunned down in the dusty street. Even his Canadian persona is undercut when his team is closed down for being as bankrupt financially as the gallstone cowboy

is culturally. Dillon is a case of arrested development. He has not matured into integrity or responsibility because he has succumbed to the seductive allures of celebrity images. When he eagerly dies for his American role, he personifies the Canadian's mortal loss of identity.

The Canadian's sense both of his own marginality and of the fatal encroachment by American culture can be discerned throughout the Ten Best Canadian features, as voted by Canadian film commentators for the Toronto Festival of Festivals in 1984. (The package has just toured eight American cities.) Six of the films are Québecois (French Canadian), but all ten are distinguished by what I am calling an "ethnic" self-assertiveness.

The poll was topped by Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971). This magnificent feature interweaves two stories. In the central plot, a young boy, Benoît, comes to understand the ambivalent, compromised character of his adoptive uncle. Though the latter may seem to be the center of the town's business and social community, with his multipurpose general store and his sidelines as foster parent and undertaker, Uncle Antoine is revealed to be weak, flawed, resigned. This doer of small good deeds remains the victim of larger exploitation. In the subplot, laborer Joe Poulin, frustrated by his English bosses, goes off to work at a lumber camp. When he walks out at Christmas to return to his family, he finds a wooden box in the road: in it he finds his eldest son, dead. The film anatomizes the processes of ambition and compromise by which a man matures and a subordinated culture struggles to survive. The film's genius lies in its interfusion of the personal themes and the political context. Hence the seething anger when the English boss rides his sleigh through town flinging silly presents into the street for his workers' children. The film's setting tacitly evokes the social ferment in the asbestos mines in the early 1950s, which proved the beginnings of Québec's Quiet Revolution (and launched the firebrand lawyer who was to become Canada's Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau).[3] The graffiti in the beer parlor washroom refers to the repressive regime of Québec Premier Maurice Duplessis but also suggests that the bitter drinkers are pissing away their resistance. The O'Keefe beer sign over the urinal is an emblem of the Québecois' occupied culture. The image of a grey iron cross and the film's persistent association of church scenes with death define the repressive functions of the church in Québec throughout the Duplessis years. In this context Joe Poulin signifies the futile defeatist who chose isolationism instead of social reform. Antoine signifies one alternative, the compromised lead-

Claude Jutra's MON ONCLE ANTOINE

ership that struggles for small human gains within the flawed social structure. The witness figure Benoît represents the new intelligence that searches the past for the seeds of present failure, to confront the flaws and to wreak social change. Thus there is the promise of political rebellion in his playful irreverence when he throws snowballs at the boss's horse. Overall, against the background of a Québec winter and in a narrative framed by two funerals, Benoît's story includes the awakening of both his and a young girl's sensuality and independence. In the last image Benoît stands outside in the cold, detached from the hollow warmth of the funeral scene inside and with a new perspective upon the generation that shaped his life.

There is a similar dynamic in the other NFB feature, Jean Beaudin's *J. A. Martin, Photographe* (1976). Against the ominous beauty of a Québec autumn, a woman revives her spirit and reaffirms her marriage and life when she accompanies her husband on his rural tour of portrait photography. Again there is the assumed tension with the English. The photographer, however insensitive he may otherwise be, takes an important stand when he overrides the English foreman's demand that he exclude from the workers' group photograph a boy who was recently fired. The photographer validates the boy's identity by including him. He refuses to let the English foreman define the reality he will record. Martin asserts the function of art, photography, as a social force. In contrast, the dying woman clings futilely to a more passive form of imagery, her religious icons. As the film sets out Mrs. Martin's grasp for an enlivening experience and joy, for relief from her deadening mundanity, and her right to a voice, the film declares its own territorial independence. Its sensitivity to the heroine's suppression speaks to (and especially for) any society that attempts to assert its character and needs against a more dominant one. There are clear parallels between the three forms of power: the husband in the marriage, the English in the Québec economic system, and the United States in the sphere of culture. Significantly, on their journey the Martins stay off the road though New England which other travelers assume to be obligatory.

This kind of political assertiveness is also

J. A. Martin, Photographe

implicit in the other Québec films on that Ten Best list. In Francis Mankiewicz's *Les Bons Débarras (Good Riddance,* 1980), the claustrophobic tensions in a backwoods family produce a domestic horror story that conveys a political allegory. Again the themes are protective suppression and a society that won't confront its captors, its deadeners. Gilles Carle mobilizes a more bawdy and irreverent spirit in *La Vraie Nature de Bernadette* (1972). Micheline Lanctot plays a wholly secular saint —a Montreal housewife who naively assumes an Earth Mother role among ramshackle rustics. Here Carle confronts a variety of modern myths, including the clichés of the back-to-the-earth 1960s and the dubious liberation of the sexual woman. In *Pour La Suite Du Monde* (*The Moontrap,* 1963) and in *Les Ordres* (1974), Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault respectively confront serious issues in the Québec past. In the former Perrault revives the ritual by which a community used to trap beluga whales. This lyrical film resurrects a particular form of cultural engagement that has fallen before modern times, modern rhythms. *Les Ordres* tells several harsh stories from behind the headlines when the federal government (under Prime Minister Trudeau) imposed the War Measures Act during the October Crisis of 1970. The chilling dramas expose the repression in that government's actions; more to the present point, they dramatize the costs to a Québecois of being a Canadian.

However different in genre and tone, all these films fling an individual political and cultural identity in the face of an English authority that would reduce the vitality of difference. All these films include powerful scenes of loss and death, suggesting a culture that is in a life-and-death struggle to survive. Of course, the very making of the film is an act of survival (that its screening would enhance). The cultural heartening that these films provide the Québecois viewer against the English Canadian society becomes an equally powerful support for the English Canadian viewer against the threatening dominance of American culture.

This general position is also struck by the respectable English Canadian films, but with some predictable differences, mainly the lack of political passion. For the English Canadian does not generally see his identity threatened as the Québecois does. Nonetheless, the English "Best" still affirm their rights to an "ethnic" identity, off the mainstream. This is even true for the film that may seem least concerned with the question of Canadian identity, Don Owen's *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (1964). This began as a National Film Board documentary project but grew into the first major English Canadian fiction feature. The film is a semi-improvised story about a rebellious Toronto teenager's problems with his girlfriend, parents, school and the law. The film's historic strength lay in its tacit insistence that the freedom and devices of the NFB's Unit B documentary unit deserved the exposure of a fiction feature. Equally heroic, the film insisted that Canadian youth, Canadian street names, and even non-American narrative strategies had the right to be seen on Canadian screens. The hero's bridling against unsympathetic authorities initiated Canadian film's claim for a toehold against the established American mainstream. The film's roughness in style and downbeat ending established a Canadian alternative to American cinema, articulated when the hero (typically an anti-hero) berates his prospective brother-in-law for following the herd to see *Cleopatra*.

Although Richard Dreyfuss was imported for the lead role, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974), directed by Ted Kotcheff, has both the literal and metaphoric functions of the "ethnic" label. The film chronicles the material success and ethical

Don Owen's NOBODY WAVED GOODBYE

failures of a young Jewish hustler in the Montreal of the 1940s. The film's charm lies in its resurrection of a Canadian milieu, both the old Montreal and the Jewish subculture. As Don Owen retrieved the present Canadian cityscape, Kotcheff recovers an authentic Canadian past. Both films' power lies in their rejection of an alien morality. Again the ethnic tradition presents a double edge. True to Mordecai Richler's source novel, Kotcheff's film satirizes the Jewish hero's destructive pursuit of the mainstream society's values. The gangster ethic is defined as an imported American style. In the lead casting, the film broadens the moral target from Canadian materialism to include the American. Duddy becomes a pastoral Sammy Glick.

In Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* (1970), the English Canadian was given his first direct vision of the class discrimination with which the Jew and the Québecois have long been familiar. Doug McGrath and Paul Bradley play two unemployed Newfoundlanders who seek their fortune in storied Toronto. Their dreams disintegrate as they find themselves increasingly driven into the despair of the outsider. The film celebrated the distinctiveness of the Maritimers' culture, doomed by the homogenizing impersonality of the foreign (albeit Canadian) city. The graffiti, "Pete McGraw was here," can be

read as a region's—or even a nation's—need to be identified, individuated against an alien conformity. The Maritimers are marginal figures, outsiders, first in their economic straits back home, then in alien Toronto. Constantly in transit, their homelessness is imaged in a scene of eviction, their pathetic furniture arrayed on the sidewalk. At film end they are back on the road, homeward bound, fugitives from a society that allowed no place for them. Their very marginality makes them the representative Canadian.

The marginal's mythology is most explicitly in Phillip Borsos's *The Grey Fox* (1982). Richard Farnsworth played the historical American stagecoach robber, Bill Miner, who came out of a long jail sentence to become Canada's first train robber. It was easy for Canadians to adopt Farnsworth as Miner. He is possessed of a sentimental grace and courtliness that Canadians pretend to sustain against gruffer pragmatism. More to the point, there is something uniquely Canadian about this dislocated innocent's seduction by the magic of his first film experience, watching *The Great Train Robbery.* Miner becomes the typical Canadian when he adopts an American model by which to survive and yet strives to protect his own new identity, until he is hounded down by the ruthless Pinkerton man (paradoxically played by a Canadian, Gary Reineke). Miner is an American who assumes the values of the Canadian (outcast, underdog, loser, etc.). At the festive scene where he is sent off to jail, there is a flurry of Union Jacks, as if the outlaw being celebrated were Canadian. Indeed his adoptive Canadianness is completed when Miner ultimately escapes and finds fulfillment—in Chicago! In contrast, the Pinkerton man personifies the negative values of the intrusive American. He arrives in the Canadian tame west in an open, noisy car. He callously pulls rank on the more attractive and sensitive young Mountie. "Cooperation is preferable to coercion," quoth the American, his rank deftly pulled. "I have more important things to do than cater to the whims of an American detective agency," the Canadian sergeant had blurted. The film expresses the Canadian sense of being slightly out of step, out of time, dislocated, and doomed by the dogged pressure from the south. Even the folk music score contributed by The Chieftains speaks to the film's detachment from American style, equally as life-choice and as genre.

These films are in their different ways exceptional expressions of a culture under seige. Though they express the character and concerns of an independent nation, they have a minority subculture's sense of threatened difference, a fear of extinction. Their integrity lies in their affirmation of their own character, against the temptation to be yet another Meatballs on the American gravy-train. But here is the crowning paradox: it is precisely in these films that other countries can find the most rewarding Canadian cinema. Canadian films have their most interest to others, especially perhaps to American audiences, when they dare to be themselves. This is a lesson that the box office rarely confirms, but which film champions of loftier mission might venture to explore.[4]

NOTES

1. The absurdities and costs of this Canadian film policy are chronicled in Pierre Berton, *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of our National Image* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).

2. Michael Dorland, "The '85 Genies go Hollywood," *Cinema Canada* #118 (May, 1985), pp. 11-16.

3. Bruce Elder, "Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine,*" reprinted in *Canadian Film Reader,* edited by Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson, Peter Martin (Toronto, 1977), pp. 194-99.

4. The author gratefully acknowledges the contribution of his colleague Joan P. Nicks in the preparation of this paper.

AMY LAWRENCE

Sorry, Wrong Number: The Organizing Ear

In *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948) the classical juxtaposition of "seeing/seen"[1] is radically overthrown in favor of a narrative based on listening, setting the usual sound/image hierarchy on its head. *Sorry, Wrong Number* can be seen as a feminine, audio-based version of *Rear Window* where sound becomes the foundation of the narrative with the image marked as redundant, subjective, primarily emotional —in other words, the connotative level to sound's denotation. Such a challenge to classical image-based narrative requires a strong response and in this film we see precisely to what extremes the text will go in order to reëstablish visual dominance.

Sorry, Wrong Number was adapted from a very successful radio drama.[2] While other radio plays have been adapted to film (*War of the World* [1938] being perhaps the best known), as with theatrical adaptations, the success of the transition from one medium to another is often felt to depend on "opening out" the stage-bound or "sound"-bound drama in ways that allow for visual spectacle (sets, scene changes, outdoor locations) and shot/reverse shot within scenes. Supposedly the primary requirement in rendering a play "cinematic" is to provide scenes where information is transmitted visually and not exclusively through dialogue. A simply "talky" adaptation is seldom seen as an acceptable alternative cinematic form. In fact such films have been specifically railed against as being non-cinematic. (See early auteurist attacks on such dialogue-strong writer-directors as Joseph Mankiewicz and Billy Wilder.) What establishes *Sorry, Wrong Number* as a tense negotiation between sound-based narrative and the image, between radio and cinema, are its retention of radio's different forms of address and its different means of constituting the listener/subject.

Radio narratives are based either on overhearing (similar to the position of the film viewer who sees without being seen or the playgoer who watches the characters through an invisible "fourth wall") or on direct address (by announcers, narrators, and even characters). A program such as *War of the Worlds* incorporates both forms while the original *Sorry, Wrong Number* sticks exclusively to a series of overheard conversations. The third-person form is potentially less disruptive when translated to film than direct address and is in practice quite compatible with classical film structures. As used in the film, however, the dependence on overhearing, both by the viewer/auditor and characters within the narrative, undermines the authority of the visual, resulting in a fragmented and potentially subversive text.

Occupying the German expressionist/*film noir* crossroads favored by many emigrés such as the film's director, Anatole Litvak, *Sorry, Wrong Number* tells its story through an increasingly complicated flashback structure held together by voice-overs and the central organizing presence of the woman to whom the flashbacks are being narrated. After a brief prologue illustrating the labor of telephone operators, the film introduces us to Leona Stevenson (Barbara Stanwyck), a bedridden woman trying to call her husband at the office. Leona accidentally overhears two men on a party line plotting to kill a woman that night. Torn between trying to alert the indifferent police and contacting her husband Henry, Leona grows more and more distraught. On top of this, she receives a series of calls from strangers, informing her of Henry's recent illegal activities. She finally realizes that *because* of her husband, she is the woman the men are planning to kill, and as she (ultimately) reaches him on the phone, they do.

Most of the telephone conversations are presented by crosscutting between Leona and the caller on the other end. These in turn lead

Barbara Stanwyck as Leona in SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

to flashbacks, signalled by a slow dissolve and a marked increase in the volume of the music, as either Leona or the speaker remembers or narrates previous events. The use of voice-over narration with flashbacks is not in itself enough to distinguish the film from other films of the time. In fact, it is rather common in *film noir* where it signals the fragmentation of the narrative. In the 1946 film, *The Killers,* a film in many ways similar to *Sorry, Wrong Number,* and even in *Citizen Kane* (1941), the flashbacks *are* the story. However, in *The Killers,* directed by fellow emigré Robert Siodmak, the flashbacks assume the authority of omniscient point of view. Although each major segment is initiated by a particular character who verbally covers the transition from present to flashback, nothing within the flashbacks themselves marks them as being to any extent subjective or controlled in any way by the character. (Whether or not *Citizen Kane's* flashbacks are subjective or objective is the subject of continuing controversy.) In *Sorry, Wrong Number,* as Leona grows more hysterical, the flashbacks and even the cuts to the caller become increasingly expressionistic both visually and on the sound track. As the film progresses, this leads to the dissolution of any sense of reliable, objective visual information.

Of the six major flashbacks, Leona herself directly authorizes one. She calls a woman Henry met for lunch that day who identifies herself as Sally Hunt, an old friend of Leona's and Henry's ex-girlfriend. Sally warns Leona that Henry might be in trouble but she can't say what kind of trouble and has to hang up. Leona, speaking to herself, says the name "Sally Hunt." This leads in standard form to a flashback (with minimum narration) showing how the rich and glamorous Leona Cotterill stole Sally's hardworking, poor but ambitious boyfriend, Henry (Burt Lancaster). The flashback ends where it began, with Leona in bed thinking. This is the only flashback that doesn't make extended use of voice-over because it is not presented as a story Leona hears, but as something she remembers.

When Sally calls back, she tells Leona that her husband who is with the district attorney's office is investigating Henry. As we cut to Sally on the phone, we see a flashback detailing how Sally found out about her husband's work. Sally's story is presented in a strongly expressionistic way, oddly reminiscent of Susannah York's "dream" in *Freud.* In voice-over, Sally says, "It was one of the weirdest days I've ever spent . . . parts [of Staten Island] seem to exist in a kind of dream, like the lonely beach we went to that day. It was quite a desolate place, Leona. Far out on the island." They're on a beach, empty and cold, near a dilapidated, boarded-up house. Sally ducks behind a broken boat, watching her husband and his men. They hide in a nearby shack and watch the house. Nothing happens. After time drags on, she sees a signal from the house. A boat appears. A man with a briefcase steps out and walks into the deserted house. Sally runs to a net-strewn stair to get a closer look. Her husband and his men leave, carrying the briefcase.

What is notably different about Sally's story are the strongly disturbing visuals with their emphasis on diagonals and extreme angles, and the disjointed and incomplete nature of the information. Sally doesn't know a lot and is in constant danger of being discovered by her husband. Her fear seems to infest her perception: "I didn't know what I expected to see. As a matter of fact, there wasn't much I *could* see at first." As she doesn't know what anything means, it all becomes heavy with portent, resulting in the exaggerated visuals typical of classical "subjective" scenes such as dreams. Leona, as our listener-surrogate, repeatedly asks what it all means. As the central organizing "ear" for whom the story is being told, she knows

as little of the significance of this striking scene as we do.

The third and most complicated structure occurs when Leona's doctor, treating her progressively worsening heart condition, tells her of a meeting he had with Henry where the doctor revealed that Leona's condition was psychosomatic. As Dr. Alexander (Wendell Corey) narrates his flashback, set in his office, Henry begins to tell him how Leona's heart condition first began as the result of conflicts of will between them. This triggers Henry's flashback within the doctor's flashback. Inside Henry's flashback, Henry comes across as a well-meaning and tender husband. The question however is whether or not this is Henry's view of himself, represented subjectively in his memory, or the doctor's view of Henry. The question of who is "authorizing" Henry's flashback leads to a third possibility—that we are back in the bedroom seeing it Leona's way: Leona listens to the doctor and puts images to both his story and his version of Henry's story.

The accelerating expressionism of the visual design and in the foreboding music begins to put not only the control of the flashbacks in doubt, but the crosscutting as well. The reason crosscuts to the speaker work so well is because they fulfill the function usually served by conventional shot/reverse shot, with the cut being signalled by the voice and not the look. When Leona receives the strangest call of the night from Waldo Evans—a man she doesn't know—the "reverse shot," the cut to identify the voice on the end of the line, reveals nothing. As he speaks, we see a silhouette shot from a very low angle. Behind him is a dark room lit only by light coming through the transom. The only time we "see" Waldo Evans is in his heavily *noir* account of his and Henry's black-market drug dealings. The (non)representation of Waldo Evans introduces the possibility that we've never left Leona's room at all. Each cut to other characters is put in doubt retroactively, submitted to Leona's subjective but authorial auditory POV. As the organizing Subject, Leona supplies the faces that go with the voices she hears, the rooms they occupy, the clothes they're wearing (Sally's "poor but honest" milieu, Dr. Alexander's tuxedo and impatient wife, as well as the unidentifiable Evans). Some voices are never given faces at all—the hospital receptionist Leona asks to send a nurse, or the operators. Their function is all we and Leona need to know. This is not to say that Leona imagines the entire movie. The voices are "real," the phone calls real (i.e., not under Leona's control). It is merely the images accompanying them that are put in question as objective visual representations of the voices we hear.

Listening to the radio or talking on the telephone thus become acts of reading, even more than watching films. Leona occupies and demonstrates the position of the radio listener, sitting in his/her home, overhearing others speaking yet unable to intervene or make herself heard. Unlike film viewers, the original radio audience would be doing the work Leona does here, providing faces for the voices and filling in the images of both caller and listener. No one's images would be more correct than any one else's. In a film, though, the images tend to carry authorial weight. And at first, the crosscutting seems to present equally objective worlds outside Leona's bedroom, balancing her growing hysteria. It is the authority of these cuts and of the flashbacks within them that are put into doubt by the obsessive return to Leona listening, asking what it all means, and the breakdown of "objective" style as Leona struggles to make sense out of the words and voices pouring into her ear.

Depending on flashbacks and crosscutting to open out the original radio play results in a perilous fragmentation of space and time which increases our dependence on Leona as the center of the narrative, the Subject constituted as the One Who Hears. Classical cinema's rules of spatial, temporal and narrative continuity strive to insure a text that seems transparent and unmediated—the story telling itself. Here, the narrative threatens to fly apart and requires an entire system of compensations to hold it together. In order to contain the potential spatial and temporal incoherence, the film constructs a "present" set in a coherent space: Leona from 9:30 to 11:15 in her bedroom. Everything else is firmly tied to this, constantly referring back to it in order to preserve a sense of unity. In radio, the "present time" would be the half hour the program covers, as the narrative

takes place entirely in the "present" and observes the dramatic unities as we listen in on Leona's telephone conversations. Spatially, to radio listeners eavesdropping with the help of radio/telephone technology, Leona is merely a voice on the line. The "where" is simply where we can hear her. When we no longer near her, she ceases to exist.

In the film, a sense of temporal continuity is maintained through: (1) the constant reference to the present through voice-over and through characters addressing Leona. (Sally asks, "Have you ever been to Staten Island, Leona?" over shots of a ferry approaching a dock.) The sound occupies the present while the images are set in the past. (2) The deadline in the present tense gives pressure to the flashbacks which are themselves under time constraints: Sally's "five minutes are up," Henry stands in the train station with a clock saying 11:10 prominent behind him. (3) Enigmas posed in the present are quickly answered in the flashbacks: Leona says "Sally . . . Hunt" and we dissolve to a ballroom and see Henry dancing with a blonde as Leona repeats "Sally Hunt" in voice-over.

Space is inevitably even more fragmented, hence the insistence on the technology of the phone system that links the scattered locations. The protocol of placing and receiving calls is stressed again and again. Operators ask standard questions, speakers repeat the numbers they want, callers ask first whether or not they have the right party. There are pay calls and person-to-person long-distance calls and over-the-phone telegram deliveries, and of course a wrong number which is in fact an inadvertently correct connection. In addition, voices are frequently "filtered" so that we hear them as if over a telephone, attesting to the literal connection of the faraway with the speaker whom we see before us. Filtering usually occurs near the beginning or end of a conversation as a way to bring our attention back to the technology. Verbal transitions are also used. When Leona is talking to Henry's secretary, the secretary asks if Leona got the flowers. "I thought camellias might be nice this time." As she says "camellias" there is a dissolve to a close-up of an arrangement of blossoms and her voice switches to a filter, both marking the transition back to Leona's room. Cutting between speakers in the middle

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of a sentence eases the transition between physical spaces while creating the intimacy of a personal conversation, much like shot/reverse shot. Furthermore, *Sorry, Wrong Number* literally softens the movement from space to space (and from time to time) with the heavy use of dissolves implying the connection between spaces rather than the distance that separates them.

The more disjointed the spatial and temporal systems of the film become and the more unreliable their visual content—the pronounced subjectivity whose authorization shifts from the speaker (Sally) to the hearer (Leona and Waldo Evans)—the more heavily we depend on Leona as the Subject, the position where all the pieces will be organized into meaning. The challenge Leona poses to classical cinema is the elimination of "seeing/seen" and the substitution of "hearing/heard." Leona understands everything eventually (makes sense of the narrative) strictly through what she's heard. If she makes seeing irrelevant, it becomes the job of the camera to render her hearing ineffectual—to place the ear at the mercy of the eye.

As a spectator-surrogate (especially a female one), it is interesting to compare the character of Leona with L. B. Jeffries in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). The films illustrate differing male/female relations to knowledge, marriage, work and voyeurism, as well as differences between sound and image and their related technologies. In place of the man who actively looks/sees/knows, *Sorry, Wrong Number* presents a woman who

accidentally overhears/against her will, learns /and, because she knows, dies. The characters are similar, as are their circumstances. Both are invalids, Jeff confined to a wheelchair, Leona to bed. Her illness is due to a (the) feminine condition of invalidism and smacks of nineteenth-century antecedents like Henry James's sister—strong women who could not openly exercise power and who masked their extraordinary will by an extravagant show of physical weakness. Dr. Alexander, praising the miracle of twentieth-century psychiatry, insists that Leona's illness is all in her mind. ("Oh, the pain's real enough," he says to Henry who smashes the nearest phone.) Jeff has become incapacitated in a more macho way, through a violent collision in the course of his work. Each is a busy-body and a meddler. Jeff uses his camera to shut out the woman in his life, to avoid marriage and fix the world as it is. Leona, on the other hand, is very much married and uses the telephone to obsessively track Henry down.

From the central base of a single room, both characters are isolated and free to use their instruments. His is the camera and hers is the telephone. However, while Jeff is able to make a living off of his visual drive, what Leona can get from the telephone is transitory compared to Jeff's captured (and saleable) moments. What Leona hears comes and goes like the train rattling the windows at night and when it's gone there's no proof that it ever passed. When Leona tries to tell the police she overheard a conversation, the problem remains that she can't prove it and they can't trace it. While Jeff can prove empirically that something is buried in the garden by comparing an old slide with a new image, Leona's "voices" remain unidentified through the course of the film. Jeff and Leona also have different relations to voyeurism. Jeff looks for pleasure; Leona listens for information. *Sorry, Wrong Number* is dialogue-based, not so much *sound*-based. There is little audio-voyeurism for the *character,* however the original radio audience would have enjoyed the voyeuristic pleasure of eavesdropping. While both films end with the main character being overwhelmed when the necessary voyeuristic distance is violated, Leona's listening is a sign of her dependence rather than her will to pursue her own pleasure.

The telephone becomes the woman's instrument, corresponding to the cultural canard about women "talking too much," "all the time," or compulsively on the phone. Like the radio, the telephone is also strictly linked to the home, the woman's sphere under patriarchy. There are several notable films where the telephone is presented as a woman's literal life line: *The Human Voice* (1948), based on Cocteau's radio drama, and *The Slender Thread* (1965), where the telephone is our only access to the "star: while the narrative's purpose is to insure that she keeps talking, i.e., alive. In both cases the women are suicidal, alienated and isolated and the telephone their only means of making fading contact.

In *Sorry, Wrong Number* we see what amounts to a network of women talking behind men's backs: the secretary talks about her boss, Sally about her husband, not to mention the rows of telephone operators making the connections. This becomes literal in the case of Sally Lord. She finds out from the newspaper that her husband is investigating Henry. But when she asks him about it, he tells her to mind her own business (presumably his isn't hers). She has to sneak into the kitchen in order to call Leona and then create an excuse for leaving the house so that she can call back from a pay phone. To some extent, the telephone empowers women, enabling them to combine their piecemeal knowledge and find out what is going on in the men's separate world. However they can only subvert (Sally's husband's plans) or disrupt (Leona interrupts Dr. Alexander's evening out and her father's philandering). The women can talk but they can't *do* anything. Sally can't stop her husband's investigation and Leona can't make Henry call her back.

Ultimately, the telephone is a sign of Leona's impotence. When she calls for a nurse because she's all alone in the house and frightened, no one will come. When she calls the number Waldo Evans left, she finds she's talking to the morgue. At the same time she is bombarded with incomprehensible information. Henry reassures her that she's safe because there's a telephone right by the bed; she says, "I've been prey to every kind of horrible call." By the time she understands what all the pieces mean, she is incapable of saving herself.

What Leona overhears is the degree of hos-

tility the world holds toward her. It is significant that she "accidentally" hears, because women aren't supposed to know their exact place in the scheme of things, i.e., that they are not subjects, but objects. Leona's "crime" lies in thinking she is a subject and in struggling to exert a degree of control over her own life. When she meets Henry, she is the sexual exploiter, taking advantage of the well-built young man's poverty. Their marriage montage is dominated by Leona repeating in voice-over, "I, Leona, take thee, Henry." However after they're married, Henry wants to decide where they'll live and do it on his salary. Leona, who had fought her father for the right to marry, the right to control her own money and to decide where she'll live, realizes that she is trapped, this time as Henry's wife (as opposed to Daddy's girl), and has a heart attack. She doesn't intentionally fake her illness ("the pain's real enough") and from this point on, her will to control her own life is masked by an increasing physical deterioration.

As far as Henry is concerned, Leona's crime is turning out to have been strong all along. To Henry, Leona is a signifier of her father's wealth, a status symbol (the beautiful "Cough Drop Queen," wearing jewels and furs), a house, a job, and finally an insurance policy. Although Henry's flashback presents him as a considerate husband, he is still willing to bet that she'll be dead within the month so that her insurance will cover his debt to the mob. When Dr. Alexander tells him her heart is sound, Henry discovers that all the time he thought he was being strong for his fading clinging vine, he was actually performing in *her* scenario. Her strength is figured as being necessarily emasculating, making his superfluous, and interfering with his ability to function as a subject.

By pretending to a power intolerable to her husband, and further, by inhabiting the center of the narrative that all information must pass through, Leona threatens to disrupt (if not supplant) the male hierarchy, especially that of the *film noir* world the male characters inhabit. This is why, like other strong women in the genre, she must be eliminated.

Further pressure on the text comes from the clash of genres. Like *Mildred Pierce, Sorry, Wrong Number* illustrates the necessary fragmentation and imbalance that result from

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trying to combine two antithetical genres, *film noir* and the woman's film. The strongest dissonance comes when women try, if only momentarily, to control the POV and the film's narration. We have already seen the visual distortion that occurs when housewife Sally Lord leaves home to spy on her husband. In *Mildred Pierce,* Mildred's discourse is shut up by an omniscient policeman and Mildred is (re)placed in her husband's custody.[4] Leona cannot be handed over to her husband as he failed to control her to begin with and is being stripped of his power by the other males.

In "The Woman's Film: Possession and Address,"[5] Mary Ann Doane shows how in the "paranoid" woman's film, the woman's look is insufficiently empowered to control the narrative. When the woman looks, she doesn't see. We see her staring wildly but there is no reverse shot. The narrative reveals her "hysteria" and not the threat that would legitimate her fear. Because of *Sorry, Wrong Number*'s virtual elimination of standard shot/reverse shot, Leona *is* able to control much of the narrative, the cuts determined by what she hears and not what she sees. However in recovering the film for the image-based classical system, this "lack" is powerfully reinstated. In the last shot of the film, as the killer approaches her bed, there is no reverse shot as Leona screams. This maintains the horror of the unseen that would work so powerfully in radio. However, a strong reason why we do not need to see the killer is because what kills Leona in the *film* is not only invisible but unvisualizable. It is the system itself—

language, patriarchy, cinema—that needs to destroy her.

The scenes in Leona's bedroom are the center of the film. In the first, Leona waits for her call to be answered. The camera follows her movements. She reaches for a cigarette and the camera pans right, revealing a clock that says 9:30 and Leona and Henry's wedding portrait. She reaches for a tissue and the camera pans left showing a table filled with medicines near a wheelchair (as she says to the operator, "I'm an invalid, you know.") However, after Leona hears the killers' conversation and calls the operator back, the camera begins to establish a certain distance from her point of view. As she begins to relate the story so far to a second operator, the filtered voice of the woman on the other end fades out so that all we hear is Leona. The use of repetition makes it less important for us to attend to what she's saying and the camera begins to investigate Leona's room. The camera pans toward the open window as the sound of a train gets louder, threatening to drown out Leona's voice. As the camera continues to pan around the room, our attention to what she is saying fades in and out depending on occasional congruencies with what we see. When she says, "I'm all alone tonight," we see a nurse's coat and a hospital bed through the doorway. Dissolving to a shot outside on the landing, the camera cranes down the staircase and into the kitchen, leaving the sound of Leona's voice farther behind. As it moves in for a medium shot of a servant's jacket hanging next to the downstairs phone extension, we hear Leona say, "There isn't a *sound* downstairs, not a sound." When we cut back to her, her eyes are cast down and she's concentrating on the telphone; the shot was not from her point of view.

Such salient camera movement does several things. First, it functions like a small descriptive paragraph, showing us the set in detail before handing over control of the narrative to Leona. (There is a similar examination of Jeff's apartment at the beginning of the equally set-bound *Rear Window*.) Second, the set established that we are, for the moment, in woman's film territory, with that genre's attention to domestic decor and a central female figure. Most importantly though, as in *Rear Window,* the foregrounding of the enunciation with this early camera movement makes clear that there is a narrative presence separate from Leona, and further, that it is a strictly *visual* presence, unknown to her. The camera exposes the limits of Leona's strictly aural POV, countering with a potentially dangerous visual POV—dangerous because it is out of her (and our) control. Camera movement not motivated by Leona's look or her gestures continues throughout the scenes in the bedroom and shifts the position of the spectator/auditor from one of listening to/with Leona to one of *watching* her listen. The sense of threat posed by the untethered camera is borne out in the climax of the film: the camera lets the killer in.

There are three major sequences not controlled by Leona's auditory POV: the opening prologue, the entrance of the killer, and the end. Each of these sections is distinctly marked as narrated. Single long takes characterized by elaborate camera movement (tracks, dollies, crane shots), call attention to themselves and to the fact that they are not authorized by anyone in the text (i.e., Leona). The prologue sports a long title roll[6] delineating the wonders—and horrors—of AT&T. After the prologue, we see a cityscape at night. Dissolve to a shadow-filled office somewhere in the city. In the distance we hear a dial tone. To foreboding music, the camera pans to an office door, dollying dramatically up to the name "Henry Stevenson" written on the glass. With a dissolve, the camera passes *through* the door and up to a close-up of a telephone with the receiver off the hook. Dissolve to Leona in bed listening to a busy signal. She demands that the operator connect her with the number, not knowing what we know. It is this unanswered telephone that will set the entire plot in motion. The camera has already given us privileged information that sets us apart from Leona.

Later, knowing Henry is about to be arrested, Leona calls for a nurse to come stay with her. In the middle of her hysterical pleas for help, the camera indulges in a slow retreat, pulling back from the bed, dollying out the bedroom window, sinking two stories past a tree to reveal a man's shadow on the house. A hand reaches in and opens the kitchen window the killers had said would be left unlocked. The extravagance of this gravity-defying camera movement is pointed because it is in fact the return of the repressed. After an hour and

some minutes, the camera forcibly reestablishes the preëminence of the visual discourse over the heretofore verbally dominated narrative structure.

As we follow the killer moving through the kitchen toward the telephone extension, we cut to Leona, literally cut off in mid-speech.

LEONA: What was that? . . . As if someone had lifted the receiver off the hook of the extension downstairs.

OPERATOR (filter): I didn't hear it, ma'am.

LEONA: Well, I did. There's someone in this house. In the kitchen downstairs. And they're listening to me now—

She clasps her hand over her mouth and hangs up. Leona's technical knowledge and telephonic expertise (understanding the meaning of the quiet click and making the correct deduction) does her no good at all. Her voice, the exclusive sign of her presence in the radio version and her sole connection to others, is denied her now and puts her in danger. When the phone rings immediately she is afraid to pick it up but has to. It's Henry.

The competing discourses, the auditory identification with Leona versus the identification with the camera (linked to the killer), puts the viewer in a suspenseful bind. If we identify with Leona, our listener/surrogate, we identify with the victim. The establishment of an alternative identification with the camera allows us to escape at the cost of rejecting Leona and auditory identification in favor of classical cinema and the primacy of the image. Radio is put in its place, cinema triumphant.

By the time Henry calls, Leona's death is defined as a "mistake." The mobsters have been arrested so they won't need to be paid. Henry doesn't want her killed because it will send him to the chair. However, Leona's death serves a greater purpose—the reestablishment of the priority of the image. Leona hears footsteps coming up the stairs. Henry tells her to walk to the window and scream but she can't pull herself out of bed. She tells Henry, "He's here!" staring at something beyond the camera. As she pleads for her life, the camera pans to the window where the train passes, drowning out her screams as planned. Leona's hands, gripping the edge of the nightstand, loosen and fall out of the frame. Music and sound effects, which are not inimical (merely subordinate) to the classical image-based system, overwhelm her ability to hear or make a significant sound. She is literally wiped out of the text, while the image makes the final judgment—if you can't *see* her, she no longer exists. This is the revenge of classical cinema.

NOTES

1. Janet Bergstrom, "Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour," *Camera Obscura,* #3-4.
2. The film's titles give sole screenplay credit to Lucille Fletcher, "based on her famous radio play." According to the editors of *Film Noir,* the 22-minute radio version was "rebroadcast seven times between 1943 and 1948 and translated into 15 languages." Eds. Alain Silver, Elizabeth Ward (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1979), p. 263.
3. For an excellent description of the film's style and plot see Leslie Donaldson's article in *Magill's Survey of Cinema: English Language Films,* Second Series, Vol. 5, ed. Frank N. Magill (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Salem Press, 1981) pp. 2225-2227. This also appears to be the only article written on the film in the past decade.
4. Joyce Nelson, "*Mildred Pierce* Reconsidered," *Movies and Methods, Vol. II,* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of Cali fornia Press, 1985).
5. Mary Ann Doane, "The 'Woman's Film': Possession and Address," *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism,* eds. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, Linda Williams Frederick, MD: AFI, University Publications, 1985, pp. 67-82.
6. Title: "In the tangled networks of a great city, the telephone is the unseen link between a million lives . . . It is the servant of our common needs—the confidante of our innermost secrets . . . life and happiness wait upon its ring . . . and horror . . . and loneliness . . . and . . . *death!!!*"

CONTRIBUTORS

BRENDA BOLLAG teaches at the University of Geneva in Switzerland. PETER BRUNETTE's book on Rossellini will shortly be published by Oxford University Press; he teaches at George Mason University. MICHAEL DEMPSEY, our Los Angeles editor, works in the film industry. KATHE GEIST teaches at Illinois State University and is working on a book about Wim Wenders. BROOKS JACOBSON is a graduate student at USC, and has written for the USC *Spectator.* MARSHA KINDER has received a postdoctoral Fulbright for research in Spain, where she will be working on a book about Spanish cinema. AMY LAWRENCE is completing her USC dissertation on the ideological effects of sound in film. HARVEY NOSOWITZ is a filmmaker and writer, currently living in Massachusetts. BARBARA QUART is finishing up a book on women directors; she teaches at the College of Staten Island in NY. ALAN WILLIAMS teaches at Rutgers. MAURICE YACOWAR is dean of humanities at Brock University in St. Catherines, Ontario.

KATHE GEIST

Narrative Style in Ozu's Silent Films

The peculiarities of Yasujiro Ozu's film style have been the subject of several important essays, most notably that of Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell in *Screen,*[1] which explores Ozu's unorthodox treatment of space and revises the humanist and/or mystical interpretations of Ozu's work by Donald Richie and Paul Schrader.[2] Missing in the Ozu literature, however, is an analysis of Ozu as a narrator. Richie emphasizes Ozu's disinterest in plot,[3] Schrader sees his narratives as directed toward "the expression of the Transcendent,"[4] while Thompson, Bordwell, and Noël Burch see him eschewing the demands of narrative to play with space independent of narrative.[5] In his *Narration in the Fiction Film,* Bordwell includes Ozu among the "parametric" filmmakers, who are defined as creating patterns "distinct from the demands of the syuzhet [plot] system."[6] Ozu, however, was far more involved in his stories than any of these authors suggest, and, while Bordwell is partly correct in asserting Ozu's interest in style for its own sake, many of Ozu's stylistic patterns are not purely formal in intent, content, or effect, but reflect Ozu's narrative and thematic interests. Moreover, previous authors have treated Ozu's art as fundamentally static and have alluded only slightly to the changes that took place in his style over thirty years. Yet Ozu's style changed greatly from the prewar to the postwar periods and also changed within those major periods.

In this essay I will explore the narrative style Ozu developed in his silent period, noting the changes that took place within it and possible sources for it. I will demonstrate that Ozu's style was intrinsically connected to both the narrative process and the meaning of his films.

Avoiding the sound revolution as long as possible, Ozu made 34 silent features between 1927 and 1935. Twenty of these films are lost, twelve from the period 1927–1929, from which only one film remains. For the period 1930–1932, seven films are lost and seven remain, while from 1933–1935, only one film is lost. Thus the accuracy with which one can judge Ozu's stylistic development increases as the period progresses.

Conspicuous in Ozu's early narrative style is his dependence on objects to convey narrative sense. In this respect he echoes the German *Kammerspiel* film, which probably influenced him.[7] Objects occur in a variety of formats: close-ups of small animals or household items, tracking shots for a series of small objects or architectural interiors, and long shots for architectural and landscape elements. Unique in the silent films is Ozu's objectification of the human body, which occurs as hands or feet manipulating other objects or as bodies framed from the waist or from the knees down.

Ozu's shots of inanimate objects and unpeopled landscapes have been noted by many authors who refer to them as empty or still-life or even "pillow" shots. Ozu's intention with such shots, however, is frequently misread. Thompson and Bordwell write, "To a large extent objects are divorced from function in Ozu's films. They become pure spatial elements, parts of still-life compositions; they are separated from any function in the flow of the narrative."[8] On the contrary, Ozu's objects are almost never divorced from narrative or thematic functions in his films; in fact they serve many overlapping functions. Sometimes they are obvious symbols such as the wheel spinning in a rut, which opens *I Was Born, But . . .* and summarizes the plight of the salaried worker as presented in the film; frequently they are symbols of transience and passage as in shots of passing trains, bridges, smoke issuing from chimneys, steam from tea kettles, changing cloud formations, and clocks.[9]

The vast majority of objects in Ozu's silent films, contrary to Thompson and Bordwell's assertion, generate the narrative either as parts

representing the whole or as references to contiguous environments. These functions correspond respectively to synecdoche and metonymy, narrative processes in literature.[10] For example, reasonably complex activities are depicted by extensive sequences of objects in motion. Such extensive sequences occur in *Walk Cheerfully* (1930), *Tokyo Chorus* (1931), and *Where Are Now the Dreams of Youth?* (1932) and suggest Soviet influence although this influence was probably mediated by the Germans.[11] The following example from *Walk Cheerfully* recalls Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a City.*

(1) window shade going up—seen from outside
(2) window shade going up—seen from inside
(3) another window shade going up
(4) waist-down shot of people walking along a sidewalk
(5) waist-down shot of people going up some steps to an office building
(6) CU of hats being hung up
(7) knees-down shot of people going up office steps
(6_2) CU of hats being hung up
(8) CU of covers being taken off typewriters
(9) MS of a woman standing by the office window and powdering her nose
(10) CU of her compact on the window sill
(11) knees-down shot of people walking on the the sidewalk—a circle of light from the compact hits the sidewalk—a pair of female feet stop
(12) MS of the heroine Yasue looking up (to see where the circle of light is coming from)

While the significance of this particular office building is not obvious until the end of the sequence, the activity depicted—an office building opening up—is clear and, with the exception of shot 9, is presented entirely through object shots.

Many scenes in Ozu's early films begin with abbreviated versions of these object-dominated sequences: the close-up of an object in motion joined by a match-on-action to a medium shot of someone manipulating that object. For example, a scene in *I Flunked, But . . .* (1930) begins with a CU of a goldfish bowl; smoke blows around it; then we cut to a MS of the hero blowing smoke on the bowl. Another scene begins with a CU of a baseball magazine whose pages are being turned; a box of matches drops onto the magazine; cut to a MS of a student lighting a cigarette while he looks at the magazine. In *The Lady and the Beard* (1931) one scene begins with a coat flying onto a sofa; hands pick it up; cut to a MS of a servant holding the coat.

Shots of disembodied hands or feet manipulating objects dwindled after *Dreams of Youth,* a film made in 1932 when shooting on *I Was Born, But . . .* stopped to allow one of the children, who had been injured, to recover. Ozu revived the practice three and a half films later in *Passing Fancy* (1933) and then abandoned it altogether. If European films from the 1920s were indeed the inspiration for these sequences, Ozu appears to have used them less as he got farther away in time from the source.

Obviously Ozu's shots of objects manipulated by an unidentified human narrate, but not in a straightforward way. We see a goldfish bowl with smoke around it and then see who is blowing the smoke. We see a baseball magazine with pages being turned and then see who is turning them. In each case effect precedes cause. Such inversion of cause and effect pervades numerous aspects of Ozu's narrative technique. Frequently dialogue titles appear before the speaker or, more confusing, the titles are followed by the listener instead of the speaker. *Passing Fancy* contains the most complex sequences of this sort. One scene begins:

Title: "Whatever you think, I choose my own women. Pick-ups aren't in my line."
MS: Kihachi (the protagonist).
Title: "She's too good for you."
MS: Jiro (the romantic lead).

Kihachi and Jiro are arguing about Harue, the young woman they have befriended, whom Kihachi loves and Jiro distrusts. Jiro, nevertheless, is the object of Harue's affections, and presumably Kihachi has just tried to persuade him to marry her. The first line of dialogue therefore belongs to Jiro and the second to Kihachi. However, until the fourth cut in this sequence, we have no indication that Jiro is even participating in the conversation. By the time we find out, we must sort back over two lines of dialogue to figure out who said what and then infer why.

Similarly, Ozu's tendency to show the aftermath of a dramatic story event instead of the event itself forces the audience to infer cause from effect. In *An Inn in Tokyo* the little boys lose a bundle containing the family's only possessions. We can imagine how angry their hard-pressed father will be, but the next scene

shows them sitting with bowed heads in front of their father *after* he has vented his anger. No reference is made to the lost bundle until two scenes later. Arriving late on the scene, viewers must fill in for themselves the missing action. Elsewhere in the film Ozu uses a similar if less significant omission to create comedy. The boys do not want to get up in the morning despite their father's prodding. A hairbrush comes flying into a shot of them sleeping at which point they sit bolt upright. In medium shot their father turns and walks away. The boys lie down again and then, without visible cause, sit bolt upright again. Obviously their father has yelled at them, but we have not been shown it—and since the film is silent, we have not heard it—but on the basis of the boys' action must surmise it. (The joke here is partly on Ozu's company, which told him to make *Inn in Tokyo* "as though it were sound."[12] Thus the action depends on off-screen sound, the humor on the fact the film has no sound.)

In the foregoing instance Ozu inverted cause and effect to create comedy. Yet his reasons for inverting them so often and on so many levels throughout his silent period are less obvious. Bordwell argues vehemently against the possibility of interpreting such "parametric" patterning,[13] yet Ozu's form and content are not as separate as Bordwell would have us believe.

Passing Fancy provides a clue. Ozu intensified his use of inversion in that film: he revived the technique of cutting from an object in motion to its manipulator (from a hand sketching a clock to a medium shot of the boy Tomio to whom the hand belongs), and he created complexly inverted dialogue passages.

In addition the film contains two riddles, which come from Tomio: "Why does a hand have five fingers? So it will fit in a glove," and "Why is sea water salty? Because salted salmon live there." In both riddles, the humor derives from reversing cause and effect. Consider that *Passing Fancy*'s story portrays a boy who must take care of his father even to the point of beating on him, while the father remains childish and irresponsbile to the very end. In fact we learn the salted salmon joke because the father repeats it to himself at the end of the film, thus assuming the child's lines. Consequently the reversals that pervade many aspects of *Passing Fancy*'s narrative style reflect the narrative content.

Of course, inversions of cause and effect occur in all of Ozu's silent films, and his motive for inventing such a radical technique was not simplistic. The process of inverting cause and effect evidently fascinated him; yet a remarkable confluence exists between the process that fascinated him stylistically and the tragicomic world he presents in his films, where honest work is hard to come by and children risk death for lack of affordable medical care, where flunking is more profitable than graduating and capricious bosses determine the private lives of their employees, a world, in other words, in which everything is the opposite of what it should be. Nor is Ozu's vision of a world turned upside down limited to social problems. In *A Story of Floating Weeds,* the characters are resigned to a world where the natural order is inverted: where a father is more or less permanently separated from his son. The pattern of inversion in Ozu's film style illustrates the world he created; that the process was probably unconscious is immaterial: style and content fit.

Having examined Ozu's use of synecdochic close-ups, that is objects or unidentified body parts in motion, and having linked them to an overall pattern of reversing cause and effect, I will now return to the second category of Ozu's object shots, the static objects or landscapes, the metonymic shots. These are the so-called empty or still-life shots which call so much attention to themselves in the late films. They show objects which are part of, associated with, or representative of a particular environment. Before 1932 they occur less frequently and with less complexity than after and usually in connection with synecdochic close-ups. However, they occur in *Walk Cheerfully* (1930), *I Flunked, But . . .* (1930), and *Tokyo Chorus* (1931). By examining the use of these shots in the pre-1932 films, one can better understand their significance in the later films.

Walk Cheerfully begins with a scam perpetrated by its gangster heroes, Kenji and Senko. Near the waterfront Senko steals a wallet and, surrounded by an angry mob, invites a gentle-

man to search him, while he passes the wallet to Kenji, posing as part of the outraged mob. The fruitless search concluded, the crowd moves off leaving only a ship's crane on camera. A shot of three rickshaws follows, then a shot of bilge water pouring out of a ship. Then we see Senko in a different location running among the boxcars on the dock. The still-life shots repeat information the audience already has—the scene's location on the waterfront—and serve as a form of ellipsis, allowing Senko to get from one location within the dock area to another. Ellipsis is one of the few narrative functions Thompson and Bordwell grant Ozu's still life shots,[14] but he developed others as time went on.

In *I Flunked, But . . .* the scene after several boys flunk their final exam begins with a close-up of a noose. The camera pulls back and reveals the noose to be part of the cord for a ceiling lamp; cut to a pyramid-shaped marker reading "Administration" with a tapping hand near it; next a medium shot of a university administrator tapping his hand near the pyramid marker on his desk. The noose is both a symbol and a joke. The hand tapping near the pyramid adheres to the pattern of the synecdochic close-up. The shots become metonymies, however, when they are repeated later in the film and thus by association signal both the location of the ensuing scene and the characters who will appear in it.

In *Tokyo Chorus* a sequence in which the hero meets his former colleague doing menial labor near the zoo begins with the title "City of Unemployment" followed by the tops of a tower and a chimney, then an oblique view of buildings photographed from the middle up. The buildings shown are from Tokyo; thus the "City of Unemployment" is Tokyo. This is the only surviving instance in which Ozu labelled his still-life shots, but his doing so here is evidence that he considered still-life shots as possible locale markers with which to introduce a scene. In *Dreams of Youth* he used two still-life shots to indicate a change of locale when the students move from the university grounds to a local sweet shop. Shots of them heading for the sweet shop are followed by the top of the university bell tower then a sign reading "Bakery Blue Hawaii." In this case the still-life shots repeat and verify the students' stated intentions. To the extent that he omitted such redundancy, Ozu rendered the still-life shots harder to read. That he intended them to be read, however, and not simply admired as digressions into narratively insignificant space, is suggested by the following sequence from *Tokyo Chorus*. The hero Okajima comes home to find that his wife won't speak to him. Unknown to him, she has, while on a trip to town, seen him doing menial labor for his former teacher. He takes off his coat and looks around the room. What he sees follows in three still-life shots:

—his wife's good kimono hanging out
—some packages laid beneath the kimono
—two white tabi (socks) sitting on a windowsill to air

Cut back to Okajima taking this in, then the title: "Did you go out today?" In this sequence of static shots of objects, akin to so many others in Ozu's films, one character reads the shots and interprets them. No random digression, the shots tell him what the audience already knows: that his wife was in town during the day. Significantly the shots are presented without an eyeline match and without cuts back to Okajima to indicate that his gaze is travelling from one object to another. Only his response tells us that he sees them, but he thereby supplies a model for Ozu's audience.

Reasoning on the basis of the objects he sees, that his wife has been to town, Okajima works backwards from effect to cause. To the extent that still-life shots lack redundancy (i.e., they have never been shown before or do not repeat information given in another form), interpreting them often requires viewers to read backwards, sometimes over a considerable length of time. Reading backwards is not always the same as reading from effect to cause, however. Sometimes one must simply acquire more subsequent information to interpret a given still life. For example, in *Tokyo Chorus,* the scene in which Okajima is fired ends with him telling his colleague, "I'm going to buy a bicycle. . . ." followed by a single shot of streetcar wires. The wires are followed by a shot of Okajima's son eating watermelon by the side of a dirt road, and a scene unfolds in which the boy plays with his friend's bicycle and then fights with his father, who brings home a scooter instead of the promised bicycle. The single shot of the streetcar wires

probably indicates Okajima's trip to buy the scooter. Much later in the film the streetcar wires reappear in a travelling shot introducing the scene in which Mrs. Okajima and her children ride the streetcar to the city. Thus the significance of the wires earlier in the film is more firmly established.

A Story of Floating Weeds opens with Kihachi's troupe arriving at the station. The scene ends with a long shot of the last member leaving the station and is followed by:

> —two vertical banners
> —a poster advertising the show
> Title: "Are you going to see the show tonight?"
> —a man having his hair cut.

The man who asks the question and is having his hair cut is an actor from Kihachi's troupe; a scene in the barbarshop follows, and we are left wondering about the banners that began the sequence. Later they are established as being outside the theater; they precede a number of scenes that take place in the theater and are never shown outside this context again. In the early sequence they evidently indicate that the troupe has established itself in the theater.

In both of these examples, the still-life shots stand not simply for a place but for an entire activity. However, confirming the nature of that activity requires the audience to read backwards. Like reversing cause and effect, requiring the audience to read backwards results in a time-bound puzzle which denies viewers immediate access to narrative information but instead requires them to put the pieces together as they become available. Similar is Ozu's practice of deliberately miscuing the viewer when scene changes occur. In *Walk Cheerfully* Kenji meets his friend Senko, who has found a job as a chauffeur. Senko invites Kenji to get in his car, and the scene ends with Senko and Kenji driving away. A title reading "The Job Kenji Found" appears followed by a travelling shot taken out the window of a moving car. We assume that Kenji is still riding with Senko and that we will watch him find his job. Instead, when the car stops, Senko and his boss get out of it and look up to where Kenji is washing windows on the company's building. Instead of indicating the continuation of the previous scene, the travelling shot out the car window occurs at a much later time after a major story event—Kenji finding his job—has taken place.

Another suppressed transition occurs in *I Was Born, But . . .* when a close-up of a telephone pole creates an easily misread pivot between two scenes, both of which contain telephone poles.[15] Ozu suppresses scene changes most often, however, through graphic matches. In *Walk Cheerfully* he cuts from a tightly framed shot of Kenji washing a window, photographed from inside, peering through the empty space he has cleaned, to a close-up of an empty space in a shoji screen that slides past the camera. The shots are so similar that it takes a moment to realize that we are no longer looking at Kenji's window, and it takes a cut to a medium shot to realize we are watching the heroine's mother, in another time and place, repairing her shoji. In *I Flunked, But . . .* the previously mentioned shot of the baseball magazine spread out on the floor is preceded by a shot of two students in a completely different location, who disappear behind a newspaper, which then fills the frame. These students have been discussing baseball: thus the cut from the newspaper to the baseball magazine matches graphically *and* topically and suppresses the scene change.

Although Thompson and Bordwell discuss at great length Ozu's penchant for creating graphic matches both within and between scenes, they fail to recognize that the motivation for many of the transitional matches is the suppression of scene change rather than "*indifference . . .* to the temporal and causal chain of the narrative" (my emphasis).[16] Insofar as Ozu deliberately suppressed cues for scene changes through graphic matches or by showing similar actions, objects, and/or subject matter, he cannot be called "indifferent" to the temporal chain of the narrative. Rather he deliberately confuses his viewer, forcing him to think back over and reconstruct the narrative after the pictures have passed.

Within the *mise en scène* Ozu's camera was likewise disinclined to give in easily to a viewer's desire for narrative information. Although he moves his camera quite often in the early films—over groups of people or objects, to follow action or to capture the view from a moving vehicle—he frequently refuses to reframe or refocus to accommodate an audience's natural interest in the story's protagonists. For example, in *Walk Cheerfully* the flapper Chieko keeps throwing Senko's hat out the

window of a moving car. The second time the hat falls, the camera frames it in the lower left corner. Senko comes toward the hat and consequently towards the camera, but in doing so his upper body goes out of frame: we have only a waist-down view of him until he bends over to pick up the hat. However, such fixity of camera position calls little attention to itself in the early films since many shots frame only the lower part of the human figure to begin with.

The stubborn camera is more noticeable when it refuses to refocus on a protagonist, a practice that appears to begin with *I Was Born, But . . .* in 1932; it corresponds with the shift from the synecdochic close-up to the metonymic still life that took place at about the same time, in which the individual shot becomes more important than the cleverly cut sequence. A scene in *I Was Born, But . . .* begins with a close-up of the family's belongings piled beside a window in the new house. The truck encountered at the beginning of the film drives into the frame and can be seen through the window as the little boys get out. However, the view through the window is out-of-focus, and the camera never refocuses; only a cut to a medium shot of the boys satisfies our desire to see them clearly. Yet Ozu was not indifferent to the possibility of rack focus. In *Woman of Tokyo*'s opening shot, he racks his focus from one group of objects to another, but later in the same scene he refuses to rack from a pile of objects to the heroine, who sits out-of-focus in the back of the shot. Obviously then the stubborn camera was not a simply a stylistic device adopted for indiscriminate use throughout the film oblivious to the narrative. Rather it was used specifically in relation to the narrative as a way of impeding the viewer's comprehension.

In fact, all of the narrative strategies discussed thus far—reversal of cause and effect, cryptic still-life shots, and disguised transitions—all slow the viewer's comprehension. Far from being indifferent to his narratives, Ozu deliberately sabotaged their forward progress. Why? *Tokyo Chorus*'s sequence at the zoo suggests a reason. Okajima meets his former colleague, who has been reduced to carrying sandwich boards to make a living. Suddenly people start rushing past them; when the men ask why, they are told that a bear has escaped. The friend suggests that they too run to see the bear, but Okajima rejects the suggestion, saying, "The bear won't affect our lives in any way." Ozu seems to reject the onward rush of story information in traditional narrative for much the same reason: the outcome of the story won't affect our lives in any way.

At the same time that he rejected traditional narration, Ozu created rich subtexts for his films involving both sociopolitical commentary and a nostalgia for the passing of life. The last of his narrative techniques that I wish to discuss here will shed some light on his development of subtexts. The technique is that of substituting one narrative event for another event that the audience anticipates seeing because of its greater centrality to the story. At times the substituted event has, in fact, greater significance than the anticipated event; at other times the substituted event simply gives the audience less direct and therefore more muted access to the emotions surrounding a central event. In the silent films this technique is not fully developed and occurs as characters substituting for each other instead of whole events. For example, in *I Flunked, But . . .* the scene which makes clear that the protagonist and his friends have flunked their final exam is followed by the previously described noose sequence. As the noose sequence unfolds, we feel sure that the protagonist must be in the office facing the administrator. Instead we find that another student, who passed the exam but feels indebted to the protagonist, is talking with the administrator about the protagonist's poor showing. His distress substitutes for the protagonist's although only in part since we later catch up to the hero and experience his keen, albeit less effusive, disappointment.

In *Tokyo Chorus* substitution is used when the hero Okajima goes to the state employment bureau. The scene begins with a travelling shot over the backs of unemployed laborers sitting on a curbstone. We see:

—a frontal shot of two of the laborers looking upwards
—smokestacks against the sky (their POV)
—two other men, A and B, sitting next to the steps outside the bureau; B is unwrapping a packet;
—match-on-action to a CU of cigarette butts in a paper wrapper

—full shot of Okajima walking along the street smoking
—knees-down shot of Okajima; his cigarette butt drops to his feet; he starts to walk out of the frame;
—A and B next to the steps: A gets up to retrieve the butt, goes out of frame; B looks on; Okajima, knees-down, walks up the steps; A returns with the butt and speaks . . .
Title: "Even a gentleman like him is jobless."
—MS of B
—MS of A, who looks off
—bicycle in a bicycle rack (A's POV)
—two-shot of A and B still sitting by the steps: they look as though they might steal the bicycle; they look up the steps (to see if anyone is coming); Okajima, waist-down, comes down the steps;
—match-on-action to a full shot of Okajima from the back (men's POV).

From this point on the action returns to Okajima, and we never see the laborers again. They function as a substitute for Okajima, who in this scene pays an apparently fruitless visit to the employment bureau. His daughter's illness has taken all his money, and he is no doubt extremely depressed and feeling desperate. But instead of showing us Okajima's mounting desperation as he talks vainly with the officials, Ozu foregrounds the visit with a portrait of unemployed laborers so desperate that they scrounge cigarette butts and are about to steal a bicycle. They are not meant to contrast with Okajima (who is a "gentleman" and can still afford cigarettes) but to represent his desperation. The POV shot of the smokestacks, made early in the sequence, identifies the workers with Okajima, who throughout the film in times of desperation looks up and sees trees or chimneys against the sky. Thus Ozu avoids a direct confrontation with Okajima's emotional state in this scene and gives it to us instead through the workers by inference. Later, when Okajima must perform manual labor and afterwards confront his mortified wife, he describes himself as a drowning man. The film's emotional climax, the confrontation between Okajima and his wife is especially strong both because we have not seen Okajima describe his desperation before and because he has been identified with the laborers in the earlier scene.

Identifying the day laborers with Okajima also suggests the common interests all workers have. Earlier in the film, Okajima tries to make this point to his boss's secretary, who persists in defending the boss even though he is so poorly paid he can't afford a new pair of shoes. (Ozu gave Marx a nod in several other early films. In *The Lady and the Beard* Marx's picture hangs improbably in the baron's house and in one scene appears behind the hero in a succession of shots. In *I Flunked, But . . .* the roommates give the clenched-fist salute while forming the word "Bread" with their arms and legs as a signal to the baker's daughter.)

At the other end of the spectrum is Ozu's un-Marxist nostalgia. *Tokyo Chorus* ends with the former teacher and students singing a song about the sadness of parting, and a sequence of one-shots alternating between Okajima and the teacher shows them fighting back their tears. At one point the teacher asks the men how many are married and how many have children, thus noting their progress through the various stages of life. In many of the silent films Ozu contrasts the different generations, treats reunions and partings with pathos, and inserts symbols of transience such as smoking chimneys and steaming tea kettles. If narrative drama won't affect our lives in any way, clearly social problems and the passing of time do. Thus the reunion at the end of *Tokyo Chorus* becomes central while the resolution of Okajima's problem (a job the teacher has pulled strings to get him) is incidental. If Ozu's unusual narrative technique teases his viewer, making it hard for him to follow the bear, it thereby helps raise subtext to the level of text.

NOTES

1. "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen* 17:2 (Summer 1976).
2. Donald Richie, *Ozu* (Berkeley: 1974); Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: 1972).
3. Richie, *Ozu,* p. 23ff.
4. Schrader, *Transcendental Style,* p. 49.
5. Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 73; Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: 1979), p. 166f.
6. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, Wisconsin: 1985), p. 275.
7. For the influence of German Expressionist films in Japan, see Tadao Sato, *Currents in Japanese Cinema,* trans. Gregory Barrett (New York: 1982), p. 32. For the preoccupation with objects in the *Kammerspielfilm,* see Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: 1973), p. 192f. and Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: 1974), p. 102f.
8. Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 64.

9. For more on this see Kathe Geist, "Yasujiro Ozu: Notes on a Retrospective," *Film Quarterly* 37:1 (Fall 1983), pp. 4–7.
10. See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (Paris: 1971), p. 92, which refers to "synecdochic 'close-ups' and metonymic 'set-ups' " occurring in film narrative.
11. According to David Bordwell, who has studied the matter more than anyone else, there is no external evidence of Ozu's exposure to Soviet cinema.
12. Richie, *Ozu,* p. 221.
13. Bordwell, *Narration,* p. 188–9.
15. See Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 49 for frame enlargements of this transition.
16. Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative," p. 71.

MARSHA KINDER

José Luis Borau *On the Line* of the National/International Interface in the Post-Franco Cinema

José Luis Borau's latest film *Rio Abajo* (On the Line, 1983–84)—a border film made on both sides of the Rio Grande—has placed its director "on the line" in several senses. Having established residency in Hollywood by spending six months of each year in Sherman Oaks, a suburb of Los Angeles where he owns a home, for the past nine years Borau has been commuting between Madrid and Hollywood, between the language of the European art film and the generic conventions of Hollywood, between working in self-chosen exile as an international *auteur* and remaining one of the pivotal national figures and one of the greatest success stories in the New Spanish cinema.

Like earlier Borau films (such as *Furtivos, Camada Negra,* and *Mi Querida Señorita*), *Rio Abajo* works the boundaries between sexual and political discourse—the same border zone explored by Buñuel, another Spaniard known for making movies outside his homeland. Like *Touch of Evil,* this border film explores the ambiguous line between good and evil: in fact, the American coproducer, Steven Kovacs, told me that to make this connection explicit, Borau had originally hoped to cast Orson Welles in the cameo role of "El Gabacho," the philosophical old gangster who finances the border crossings—a role that was played in the film by Sam Jaffe shortly before he died.

Although *Rio Abajo* has proved to be a critical and commercial success in Spain, because of the limited size of its home market that success could pay only the interest on the Spanish loans that Borau had incurred to make the film; in order to make back the principal, the movie must do well outside of Spain—in Latin America, in Europe, and most importantly, in the prime market for which it was intended, the United States. According to Kovacs:

> Counting the interest that has accumulated on the loans over the past four years, the film cost over three million dollars. It would be almost impossible for Borau to recoup his losses on this film—even if it did receive adequate distribution. But so far American distributors have dismissed the film as a dirty Mexican picture. To them all Spanish-speaking people are alike—Spaniards, Mexicans, Argentinians—filthy, conniving subhumans.

When I interviewed Borau in June of 1985, he told me: "The film opened in Spain in November of 1984. It's due to open here in the States in September or October, to be distributed by New World Pictures. It will open in six markets with an advertising budget of $250,000." But when I spoke to Borau again in July of 1986, he said that the deal with New World Pictures had fallen through. After Borau had his overseas agent Robert Little (of Overseas Film Group) sell *Rio Abajo* in other foreign markets such as Italy and Japan in order to recoup the costs of redoing the sound track for the American version, New World was no longer willing to pay the $250,000, which had been their offer for total world rights. Borau rejected their new offer and continued searching for a company that would put up a more substantial advance. As

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of this writing, Borau has received several offers from US television, cable and video companies who are willing to pay more than New World, yet he's reluctant to sell the film to ancillary markets before it has opened in theaters. Thus, while Borau and Kovacs have both gone on to work on new movies, Little is still searching for a deal for the American theatrical release. Kovacs claims that most of the American distributors who have seen *Rio Abajo* think it's not "arty" enough to be European, nor "commercial" enough to be American. In other words, it's "on the line."

Rio Abajo has placed Borau on the border of financial insolvency—a precarious position from which he is now trying to extricate himself with his new film *Tata Mia,* which he wrote and directed and coproduced (with Antonio Isasi). The film was shot this spring in Spain, with fifty percent of the budget advanced by loans from the Spanish government and with the rest coming from Spanish television. Like *My Dearest Señorita,* it is a social comedy that promises to have great commercial appeal within Spain while still addressing serious moral and political issues. The film stars popular Spanish actress Carmen Maura as the daughter of a Franquist general who has spent the past seventeen years of her life in a convent, and who now confronts a new Spain that is radically different socially, politically, and psychologically from the country she once knew. As her guide through this new moral wonderland, she seeks out her old childhood governess "Tata," who is played by the great Spanish star from the thirties, Imperio Argentina. The film is scheduled to open in Madrid this winter. In every way imaginable, *Tata Mia* promises to be a stark contrast to *Rio Abajo*—particularly in the speed with which it was conceived, executed and released, and in the way it is unequivocally Spanish.

Traditionally, the primary way that a Spanish (or any other foreign) film gets distribution outside of its own country is by doing well at international festivals. But when the Spanish government tried to place *Rio Abajo* in competition as an official Spanish entry at the annual festivals in Berlin, Venice and Moscow, it was refused on the grounds that "it has the appearance of a North American production and is not very representative of Spanish cinema." This same excuse was cited again as one of the main reasons why *Rio Abajo* was not chosen by Geoffrey Gilmore of the UCLA Film Archive for inclusion in its August-September 1986 program of 18 "recent Spanish films by Spain's most talented new generation of film-makers."

Ironically, despite Borau's original intentions, the only sense in which *Rio Abajo* can still technically be called a Spanish-American coproduction is that it was jointly produced by the Spanish company El Imán and by the American company Amber Films—both of which are totally owned by Borau himself. Although the idea for the film was originally suggested by American writer Barbara Probst Solomon, according to Borau he wrote all of the many versions of the screenplay himself and she only "translated" his original treatment and first draft of the script. Virtually all of the money in the film came from Spain —except for $50,000 raised outside of Hollywood by the "American" coproducer Steven Kovacs (who is actually a Hungarian emigré). Nevertheless, because of its locations, subject matter, and use of American actors, *Rio Abajo* has seriously challenged the boundaries of the Spanish cinema by venturing into international terrain precisely at the moment when post-Franco Spain is most eager to transcend its cultural isolation.

An Overview of Borau's Career within the National/International Interface

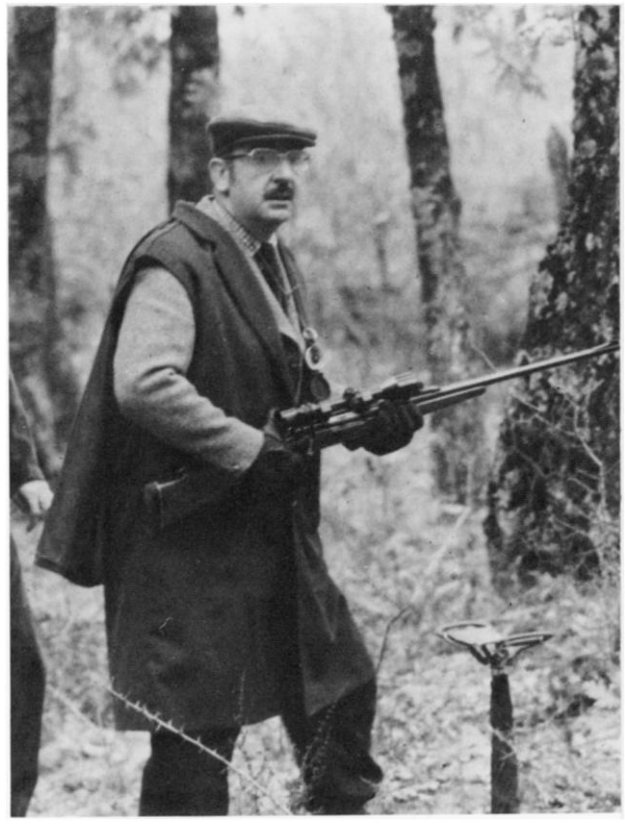
> *Ever since I was a child, I always loved movies—films by Fritz Lang, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford. I wanted to do a film here. I thought it would be possible. I came here eight years ago. I bought a house. I brought the money from Spain, but it was a long, long suffering. It took more than five years of my life.*
>
> Borau, interview, June 17, 1985

José Luis Borau is a fascinating film-maker whose career is marked by a central paradox. On the one hand, he is the director, cowriter, and producer of *Furtivos* (Poachers, 1975), a film released on the eve of Franco's death and generally credited with being a turning point in Spanish film history. The first film to present a negative portrait of a civil governor (superbly played by Borau himself), it also became the first film to be exhibited in Spain without an official license. Dealing with incest and matricide and exposing the cruelty and

deception that lay beneath Franco's deceptive image of Spain as "a peaceful forest," this powerful work proved to be one of the top-grossing Spanish films of all time as well as the film that went the farthest in pushing against the remaining censorship codes during those two years of increasing liberalization immediately preceding Franco's death.

Borau also is the producer and cowriter of other courageous Spanish films made both before and after Franco's death. *My Dearest Señorita* (1972), directed and cowritten by Jaime de Armiñán, challenged sexual borders with a sympathetic portrait of a transsexual, exploring the rigid boundaries that bourgeois institutions impose around gender and class. Nominated for an Oscar for best foreign film, it lost out to *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*—a much more radical attack on the bourgeoisie by Spanish exile Luis Buñuel. *Camada Negra* (Black Brood, 1977), directed and cowritten by Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón (who was also the cowriter of *Furtivos*), was one of the few films made in the early post-Franco transition era that still was threatened by official censorship and theater bombings. A satirical portrait of a Falangist family of brothers who are choir boys by day and terrorists by night, the film focuses on the making of a Fascist, the youngest in the family. Caught in a deadly triangle between his overpowering repressive mother (associated with the Church) and a young single mother who initiates him sexually, the boy becomes warped sexually, politically and morally. These films are all highly Spanish, all very intense in their coupling of sex and politics, all very controversial in their reception inside Spain, and all highly respected in the international context. They are primarily responsible for establishing Borau's reputation as a courageous force within the New Spanish Cinema.

On the other hand, Borau has always been a great admirer of American cinema—its action genres, its transparency and its technical expertise. Carlos Saura has been quoted as saying, "Borau is the Spanish director who is best at directing. He knows a very great deal about technique, and he likes to exercise it."[1] Yet technique is always invisible in Borau's films. Unlike Saura, he chooses not to experiment with reflexivity and not to emphasize the signifier. Like dominant Hollywood cinema, he focuses the spectator's attention entirely on the signified:



Jose Luis Borau as the civil governor in his FURTIVOS

> I think when people go to see a movie, there's some kind of contract. You go to see the film and suppose the camera doesn't exist. As soon as you see the camera move, it begins to develop its own personality and becomes somebody else. And I don't need anybody else. In order to express myself, I need only the audience and me . . . If you say, "how marvelous the landscape and the photography," then you are not thinking about the story. I want the audience to be watching the human beings in action, not the photography or the moving camera.[2]

He has always cited as his primary influences not only Ford and Hawks but also Hitchcock, Lang, and Renoir—all three European *auteurs* who made the move to Hollywood with varying degrees of success.

Both before and after the death of Franco, Borau wrote, directed and produced a number of action films that fit comfortably within established commercial genres and that were intended for an international market. Such works include his first two features, *Brandy* (1963), subtitled "El Sheriff de Losatumba," which was a Spanish-Italian western (coproduced by Alberto Grimaldi) that predated

Leone's successful spaghetti westerns; and *Crimen de Doble Filo* (Double-Edged Murder, 1964), which Ronald Schwartz describes as a psychological noir thriller set in Madrid that pays homage to Hitchcock.[3] Though both of these films show American influence and have international appeal, they were shot in Spain with a Spanish cast and aroused little or no interest outside their home market.

During a ten-year leave from directing, Borau established his own independent production company, El Imán, in 1967, of which he remains the sole owner, and produced and wrote films directed by others—*Un, Dos, Tres, Al Escondite Inglés* (Hide and Seek, 1969), directed by Iván Zulueta, and *Mi Querida Señorita* in 1972. During this period Borau also was teaching screenwriting at the Escuela Oficial de Cinematografia (from which he himself had graduated in 1961) and had a strong influence on his colleagues and students, many of whom would later be his collaborators on future film projects. Both through his teaching and his producing the movies of other film-makers, Borau's personal impact on the New Spanish Cinema was able to go far beyong his own directorial efforts as an *auteur*.

In 1974 when Borau returned to directing, he was now ready to take another big step toward international film-making with *B Must Die* (Hay Que Matar á B)—a commercial genre film he directed, produced, and cowrote (with Antonio Drove). This Spanish-Swiss coproduction was originally made in English and later dubbed into Spanish for the version that reached the home market. It featured a bankable international cast including Darren McGavin, Burgess Meredith, Patricia Neal, and Stephane Audran. In a complex plot evocative of both Lang and Hitchcock, McGavin played a Hungarian exile who was set up to perform a political assassination and then murdered in turn by those who had hired him. Set in an undetermined South American country, this sophisticated political thriller originally involved Basque characters, but government censors made Borau change their nationality so that the political implications would be less threatening to the Franco regime, particularly in light of the 1973 assassination of Franco's right-hand man, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco.

Following Borau's critical and commercial success with *Furtivos* and *Camada Negra,* he now had the funds to pursue his goal of international film-making on an even larger scale with *La Sabina* (1979). According to Roger Mortimore, the Swedish Film Institute put up thirty percent of the 74 million peseta budget (about a million dollars) for this international coproduction, which was shot in color and CinemaScope and was Borau's first directorial effort written without a collaborator.[4] Though set in Andalusia, the film features a well-known international cast, including Harriet Andersson, Jon Finch, Carol Kane, Simon Ward, and Angela Molina. Working with actors who come from such varying cultures and acting traditions presents a formidable challenge to any director, particularly in creating a consistency of tone—a challenge that Borau doesn't totally master (nor for that matter did Bertolucci in *1900*). Moreover, in the dubbed version the film lost the nuances in the dialect differences that were so crucial to the linguistic subtext that Borau was developing. Focusing on sexual rivalries and tensions among a complex network of couples, the film ends with the self-destructive male rivals, who are sexually drawn to each other, leaving behind the women they evade, share and compete for, and entering a mysterious cave where they are devoured by La Sabina, a mythological female monster. Despite its unevenness, the film helped to establish Borau's reputation as a film-maker who could effectively combine Spanish themes and locations with an international appeal.

The very next year, 1980, Borau started working on the script for *Rio Abajo,* the film he hoped would fully realize his long-term goal of international film-making. This time the project was intended to be a Spanish-American coproduction—a commerical genre film made in America with primarily an American cast and a Spanish crew, including Teo Escamilla, Spain's most distinguished cinematographer. Although some Spanish critics like Vicente Molina-Foix and Augustin Sanchez Vidal point to Borau's return to the hunt metaphor, which was so central to *Furtivos,* and discuss *Rio Abajo* as part of a trilogy of border films that also includes *Furtivos* and *La Sabina,*[5] this time there would be no references to Spain; the subject would be a more

conventional love story between an American boy and a Mexican girl set against the political context of illegal immigration. This time Borau would really be working in self-chosen exile—according to a long-range plan carefully designed and executed over the years. He would be risking the charge that he was abandoning his country and culture. But he had already answered those charges in a powerful essay called "Without Weapons" (1983), which he wrote while making *Rio Abajo*.

> It is not all that clear that if you go away you stop helping your people. Did Picasso hurt Spain or Miró undermine Catalonia in any way by leaving? . . . Could anyone say that about Buñuel, even though he changed his nationality? On the contrary, aren't they the best proof in the world (and maybe the only one aside from the bullets and blood of the Civil War) that we Spaniards are still alive and breathing? Would it have been better if they had stayed home? . . . Who would have recognized the importance of their contributions? Whom would they have helped?[6]

While Borau correctly anticipated the criticism he would receive for choosing a non-Spanish subject, he seriously underestimated the difficulty he would have in finding American funding. Barbara Probst Solomon originally proposed that Borau obtain one third of the budget from Spain while she would raise the other two thirds in the States. Although Borau succeeded in getting his share ($600,000) from the Spanish government for an international coproduction, Solomon never raised a penny. Although Kovacs later succeeded in getting International Film Investors (the company that had produced *Ghandi* and *The Killing Fields*) interested in *Rio Abajo,* the deal was affected by larger political and economic pressures in both countries that made the deal fall through. According to Borau:

> International Film Investors was getting a government loan from the small business program. It was the only film company involved in this program. They had to wait for a government approval of a loan, and Reaganomics froze the situation. It was Summer of '82, and we were waiting for the money, and they were waiting for the government approval. I had permission to take money out of Spain in Summer of '80 and this permit expired on December 31, 1982. I knew that a new law was coming in Spain—new elections were coming in October and clearly the Socialists would win and the government policies would be changed. So I knew I had to start the film before December. I asked Steve, "Do we have enough money just for the shoot?" All we had was the $600,000 I had brought from Spain, plus money spent in Spain. We paid Victoria Abril, the cinematographer, the photographic crew, the technicians, in Spanish money. They were all Spaniards. Steve said yes, so we went ahead.

It was a good thing Borau didn't wait because by the time International Film Investors got an approval of their loan, they were no longer interested in *Rio Abajo*.

While Borau realizes that this situation is not unique, that similar difficulties have been suffered by many foreign directors (particularly Eastern Europeans) trying to make their first American film, he points out: "Directors like Kadar, Forman, Polanski—they came here themselves—they didn't bring the money from their home country as I did." Moreover, unlike the Eastern Europeans, Spaniards are no longer fleeing from political repression—at least, since the death of Franco—and yet, as artists "who are citizens of a weak country," Borau thinks they have little or no chance of gaining international recognition if they stay at home.

> Spain is no longer the victim of a Fascist dictatorship. Our books and our films don't arrive bedecked with the palm of martyrdom. No one has to listen to us because it is humane or politically expedient to do so. The waters have finally returned to the river bed: the situation has returned to "normal." ("Without Weapons," p. 86)

According to Borau, that "normal" condition means being a citizen of a country that "completely disappeared from the world stage two hundred years ago."

Rio Abajo as Border Film

Although, on the surface, *Rio Abajo* seems to fit totally within the conventional border film and the dominant Hollywood stylistic, a number of tensions create a subtext that interrogates the genre's sexual and political codes. *Rio Abajo* is the story of Chuck (Jeff Delger), a young American very naive both sexually and politically, who comes to Laredo with his buddy Jonathan (Paul Richardson) to become a border guard like his Uncle Willy Bryant (David Carradine). While looking for his uncle, who has since become a "coyote" (a paid guide who helps illegal aliens cross the Rio Grande), Chuck meets up with Mitch (Scott Wilson), his uncle's racist alter ego who

ON THE LINE: *The opening border-crossing sequence*

is one of the most aggressive members on the force. These antagonist macho models, who are both morally ambiguous, lead Chuck across the border where he meets and falls in love with Engracia (Victoria Abril), a beautiful young Mexican whore, whom all three men patronize. Ignoring the incestuous overtones, Bryant offers Engracia as a gift to his nephew (whom another whore mistakes for his son), while Mitch uses her to get to Chuck, who arouses in him a repressed homosexual desire. Eventually Chuck marries Engracia, sneaks her across the border, and, when she is sent back to Mexico, even crosses over to his uncle's side to help him smuggle Mexicans across the Rio Grande. Functioning as the primary obstacle to all border crossings both on the sexual and political registers, Mitch hounds his macho rival Bryant and oversees his arrest, sexually harasses Engracia and reports her to Immigration, and torments Chuck by describing his own sexual exploits with Engracia and forces him to choose one side of the border. Significantly, it is Engracia, the female object of exchange and the victimized Mexican whore, who ultimately proves most potent. Though neither male nor American—the sexual and political categories normally associated with power within the border film genre—she is the one who gets revenge against Mitch by stabbing him to death, not only for herself, her sex, and her people, but also for Chuck and his Uncle Willy.

The opening action sequence is very effective in immediately identifying the genre and establishing the ambiguities against which the film is to be read. It opens with a long shot of the Rio Grande just before sunrise, the border between night and day, with the dark figure of Bryant leading about twenty illegals across the river, urging them on in his broken Spanish and also communicating by walkie-talkie in English with someone on the other side. Suddenly a plane flies overhead from which an amplified voice (which, we later learn, belongs to Mitch) shouts: "Coyotes, you're going in the wrong direction." Mitch is introduced as a man who loves playing a "deus ex machine" —whose position as border guard and whose air power give him an inflated sense of his mission, leading him to focus his wrath and his "hunt," not on the "wets" but on the treacherous "coyote" who used to be on the force. He booms out his violent threats as if they were divine commandments: "If you cross this river again, you're putting your life on the line!" Once on the ground Mitch's

voice loses its divine resonance and develops almost a tremorous whine, yet his distorted sense of his own moral superiority is still apparent in his swaggering walk and in his sneering grin. This opening sequence also establishes Bryant's moral ambiguity. Though he is encouraging to the Mexicans during the crossing, like Mitch, he also refers to them as if they were livestock: "We'll have 'em to the derrick and then we can pack 'em" . . . "all we got to do now is let 'em loose." We know he's in it for the money: we're as yet unsure whether there is any other motive.

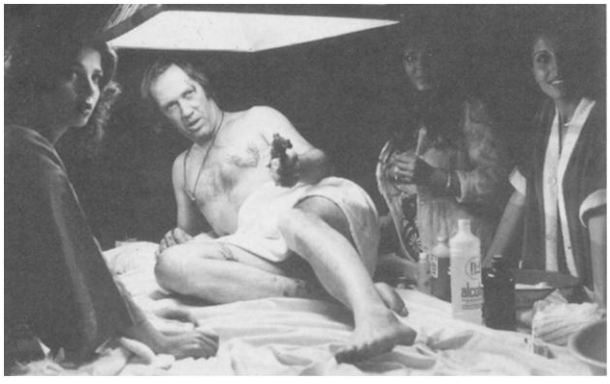
The film's second main sequence introduces the young protagonist Chuck. With his first appearance, the film begins to falter, partly because the opening led us to expect that Bryant and Mitch would be the two main antagonists, but primarily because of the weak performance of the inexperienced Jeff Delger, whose lines had to be redubbed.

Though the performances of David Carradine and Sam Jaffe are both strong and the characters they play intriguing, unfortunately neither role is developed very fully. Kovacs explained that these parts were enlarged once these two well-known American actors agreed to do the film—a line of revision that, in my judgment, should have been carried much further. Jaffe's "El Gabacho" remains a mysterious gringo in Mexico who contributes very little to the plot, but who strengthens the intertextuality with other American action films (in one shot he looks at the same calendar he had admired in John Huston's *Asphalt Jungle*) and who delivers some of the film's most explicit political lines: "Things look different from here, don't they. All these people want is to go to the States and make a decent living. I see nothing wrong with that."

While Carradine's Willy Bryant is crucial to the narrative, he appears in relatively few sequences. In fact, one of Carradine's best scenes—the one in which Bryant appears most morally ambiguous—was originally intended for Mitch. Suggesting that Chuck and Jonathan do some target practice, Bryant tries to goad them into shooting animals instead of beer cans and taunts them with a rattlesnake to test "who has the balls." Though Jonathan (who has left home to escape his Reverend father) shows he's a better shot than Uncle Willy, as soon as there's a live target (the

rattlesnake that threatens Chuck's life), Bryant outshoots him, proving that the only test that counts is when there's a life on the line. The Oedipal rivalry in the original target-practice scene would have intensified the sexual tensions between Mitch and Chuck, but once reassigned to Bryant, the scene helps to strengthen his symbolic connections as Mitch's antagonistic double. In fact, after shooting the head off the snake, Bryant implies that this feat of machismo questions the manhood not only of the boys but also of his archrival Mitch. Laughing, he says, "Guess you kids are still tied to Mitch's apron strings." In a later scene when Bryant is caught smuggling aliens across the border and Jonathan's sharp-shooting causes the death of a young Mexican, Bryant reminds him of his earlier righteousness: "Ah, the animal lover . . . guess you prefer to practice on people."

Another of Bryant's strongest scenes is his first meeting with Chuck, who has been brought by Mitch to Boystown, the authorized Mexican zone of prostitution where Engracia works and where Bryant frequently hangs out. Chuck's first view of his uncle is of a naked man lying face down with his legs spread wide on a pool table under a bright light while a group of Mexican whores dutifully pick cactus thorns out of his backside (which he acquired in the opening sequence while running away from Mitch and the border patrol). Though he is literally caught with his pants down, Bryant still manages to maintain his arrogant machismo in this embarrassing posture. More important, this strikingly provocative image introduces



Bryant (David Carradine) maintains his machismo

the highly charged sexual atmosphere, not only in which Chuck becomes sexually drawn to Engracia, but also in which the repressed homosexual subtext gets started. Mitch even quips, "I didn't know acupuncture was a turn-on."

The film's most interesting male character is Mitch, particularly as played by Scott Wilson. He embodies the cruelty and sexual repression that not only drive the plot forward, but that also enrich the subtext and that connect this film to Borau's other Spanish works like *Furtivos, La Sabina* and *Camada Negra.* He is a corrosive force who is effective in projecting his own malice and desires onto others. Playing an Iago or Claggart to Chuck's Othello or Billy Budd, Mitch's nervous energy, emotional intensity, verbal dexterity, and ironic sense of humor make him charismatic in a hateful sort of way. These qualities are best displayed in the scenes that most clearly reveal his sexual dynamics with Engracia and Chuck.

After roughing up a Mexican TV journalist covering the hearing on the border killing, Mitch asks Chuck to go with him to Boystown. His anger makes him reveal how his political and sexual behavior are intertwined —how his racist machismo forces him to repress his own homosexual desire and to treat all Third World people as whores: "Those dirty Mexicans been fucking us long enough. Now we're gonna fuck them." When Chuck refuses to go, Mitch purposely arouses his jealousy, telling him he'll go to see Engracia himself, but then waits for him in a bar. Once drunk, Mitch delivers a long seductive monologue, full of strategic pauses in which he gauges Chuck's nonverbal responses—a monologue that, in using Engracia as a sexual go-between, clearly articulates the latent homosexual dynamics that underlie so many male-dominated buddy movies in so many American action genres.

> You got a bad case of pussy fever, kid. [pause]
> I understand 'cause she's got somethin' special. You can't keep it for yourself. So why not share it with a friend? It's got a nice kind of a ring to it. Like two buddies having a drink together. [pause] . . .
> We're not gonna get laid, we might as well get drunk. To Engracia. [lifting his glass for a toast]
> To us. [pause, Mitch stands up, goes over to Chuck and puts his arm around him and continues the monologue as the lights in the bar grow dimmer]
> You know what I like about her? She doesn't like to do it. But she's a real pro. You know how she starts out by faking it, and she just gets caught up in it and she starts to likin' it and likin' it and lovin' it. At least that's the way she is with me. [pause]
> What's she like with you, kid? [pause, Chuck removes Mitch's arm from his shoulder]
> What's the matter? You don't wanna talk about it? Well, you're wrong. That's the best part of it, talking about it afterward.

Chuck is so deeply shaken by this encounter, that it drives him to immediately send a telegram proposing marriage to Engracia, presumably so that he can have her all to himself, but also so that he can escape the latent homosexuality, which exists not only between Mitch and himself, but also between Mitch and Bryant, and between Chuck and his buddy Jonathan. Not only is Bryant an antagonist double for Mitch, but the boys also double for the older generation of buddies before they were estranged—with Jonathan in the role of Mitch and Chuck as Uncle Willy. In a later scene, when Jonathan unknowingly helps Chuck transport Engracia illegally across the border, the two young men stop at a motel, where Jonathan insists on sharing a

room. Instead of revealing that Engracia is in the trunk of the car, Chuck uses the threat of homosexuality as an excuse for why they need separate rooms: "People come here just to get a quick lay. I don't want them to get any funny ideas about us being together."

Mitch's second powerful scene is an explicit sexual encounter with Engracia (a payment for his promise to help her get back into Boystown after her unsuccessful attempt to cross the border into the US as Chuck's bride). His lines reveal that he is still more turned on by the verbal mind-fuck than by the physical sex act. As in the scene with Chuck, Mitch tries to demonstrate the superiority of his own power position and to project his own desires onto her. But unlike Chuck, Engracia talks back, and her physical moves demonstrate that she thinks *she's* in control. The scene is like a battle between moves and words. As she unbuttons his shirt and pants and kisses his neck, chest and nipples, Mitch passively sits back smiling and asks: "You heard from Chuck?" While the implication is that he knows she is probably fantasizing about making love to Chuck, the same could hold true for Mitch. When she expresses her anger at Chuck for not telling her he was with Immigration, Mitch responds, "You people don't exactly love us." Just as he had earlier used Engracia with Chuck, now he identifies himself with the young man as if that will make her transfer the desire she feels for her husband onto him. When Engracia begins to go down on him (a sex act that could as readily be performed by another man), Mitch passively lies back with a sneering smile and says, "Somebody has to do the dirty work. For instance, you don't like me but I pay you good . . . Don't you get a certain satisfaction outa doin' somethin' you don't like—and knowin' you do it better than anybody else?" Designed to humiliate her and to show that he's in control, this line makes us recall that in the earlier sexual monologue with Chuck, Mitch had also projected the satisfactions he derived as a border guard onto Engracia as a "real pro" who does her job "better than anybody else." As Mitch talks, there is a strange, revealing close-up of his face. Then Engracia looks up and confronts him with her silent gaze, acknowledging that they are both professional whores, equals. As if to deny this insight that

his own words have generated, in his first active physical move, he pushes her head back down to his groin. Then the image cuts to a close-up of Chuck (from the next scene)—the missing member of their sexual triangle who brings them together and whom they both desire.

The strongest character in the film is unquestionably Engracia, partly because of the stunning performance by one of Spain's leading young actresses, Victoria Abril, who is virtually unknown to American audiences. Her sexuality and screen presence are so strong that she overwhelms Jeff Delger, making him appear even more inept and inexperienced than he is as an actor or than the character Chuck is intended to be.

The force of Engracia's screen presence is also intensified by the vibrant colors with which she is associated. Her lushly colored costumes—such as her bright turquoise robe, scarlet chemise, and royal-blue low-cut wedding dress—and the vivid reds and greens of her bedroom at Boystown help convey the bright flash of Hispanic flamboyance that she brings to virtually every scene, particularly in contrast to the drab greys, browns, and greens of many of the Texas settings. (Her first close look at the States is the seedy site where Chuck lets her out of the trunk of his car—a garbage dump under the distant tower of a Hilton Hotel.) The blue-and-lavender butterfly outlined in white neon at the El Papillon nightclub and the red neon windmills function as images of Engracia's powers of transformation. The rose tattoo displayed on her chest in the final sequence, according to Borau, is a deliberate allusion to that torrid Tennessee Williams melodrama, in which another great European actress, Anna Magnani, made her American debut. Intending to entice and then murder Mitch, Engracia wears a seductive

black dress with sequined stripes, which hypnotically holds the gaze, not only of her intended victim, but also of the spectator. When she plunges the knife into Mitch, his bright red blood splatters on her face, marking not her guilt but the extravagant flair with which she carries out the deed and signalling a shift in generic conventions from the American border film to Hispanic melodrama.

Engracia's character also draws strength from being the center of a subtext on language —which was also a primary thematic concern in Borau's *La Sabina.* As she becomes involved with Chuck, we watch Engracia learn how to speak and write English, by means of a toy computer game called "Speak and Spell"—a process that shows not only her capacity for intellectual growth and acculturation, but also the price of infantilization demanded from emigrés by the imperialist culture whose language has colonized the world. The scene where Engracia first sees this linguistic toy is one of the best in the film, for it is one of the few times when the Spanish language dominates the sound track and one of the few sequences where the political issues transcend the melodrama. In a shot that has almost a documentary look, we see Engracia sitting among a group of whores with their small children watching on a TV set the Mexican news coverage of the inquiry into the border incident in which a Mexican boy was killed. When the women recognize Mitch as the border guard attacking the Mexican TV reporter (in a mediated vérité replay of what we had earlier seen from a different perspective and in a different filmic style), this gringo is suddenly transformed into a villain; in fact, the word *cabron* ("bastard") immediately appears on the child's "Speak and Spell." Even though these media—of television and computer toys (like movies)—are normally associated with the colonizing influence of the United States, this scene suggests they can have a subversive effect when put into the hands of the Third World.

Even before learning to write English, Engracia demonstrates her sensitivity to the political implications of language—a dimension that is even stronger in the screenplay than in the film. In her very first scene, when Mitch asks her the racist question of whether she's "getting ready to make the jump . . . to America," she points out that he has dismissed Central and South America, by replying: "What do you mean by 'America'? The States?" In the film she merely answers, "What for? I'm still doing fine in my own country." In both versions she is proud of being a Mexican, and is in no way apologetic for being a whore. Boldly groping her prospective clients, she is the sexual aggressor both with Chuck (because of his inexperience) and with Mitch (because of his sexual taste). For Engracia, making love is another means of communicating with the alien. When she offers to teach Chuck her language, she tells him that "the best place to learn Spanish is in bed." When Chuck first tells her his name, she explodes: "That's not a name, that's just a noise." Then mocking the driving of a train, she syncopates the sound, singing, "Toot, choc-a-choc-a-choc-a-choc"—a line that sounds like it comes right out of a Carmen Miranda routine, but which Engracia manages to make very sexy. By drawing our attention to the name, she makes us see that phonetically it is closer to *Chac,* the Mayan god, than to the royal name *Charles,* which she fails to recognize on his telegram proposing marriage. Engracia enables us to realize that acculturation could potentially move in both directions —if it were not for the racist structures of imperialism. Later, after Chuck has left the force, when Engracia asks whether he will be able to find any work in Mexico, a Mexican cynically replies: "This is the real land of opportunity, especially for a gringo!" After the murder (with the aid of "Speak and Spell"), Engracia finally succeeds in writing her first letter in English to Chuck in prison as Bryant dumps Mitch's corpse into the Rio Grande. She ends her letter with the saying that Mitch attributed to Mexicans but which she attributes to North Americans: "What goes downstream belongs to nobody." In killing Mitch, she symbolically destroys the obstacle, not only to their happiness, but to all forms of border crossings, yet the institutional obstacles remain intact. Nevertheless, the film ends with Engracia reaffirming the values of acculturation and rootlessness.

The strongest scenes in *Rio Abajo* are those between Engracia and Mitch, not only because they are the best characters built on the best performances, but also because the dynamic

between them carries the greatest force both on the sexual and the political registers. Not only do these scenes repeatedly show Engracia proving her equality, but they also reveal that those in power like Mitch always try to colonize others by putting them in the subordinate role of female or child and by using economic support to reduce them to the status of whore. Despite the censorship of the Catholic Church, the focus on sexual discourse was always one of the most powerful means of dealing with political issues within the repressive Franco regime—a common strategy of the New Spanish Cinema that Borau had pushed to its extreme in films like *Furtivos* and *My Dearest Señorita.* In *Rio Abajo* he adapts that strategy to the international context—to an economically ravaged Third World country like Mexico (embodied in Engracia) and to a Western European nation just emerging from cultural isolation like Spain (represented by Borau) which are both struggling for equal partnership and political independence within their unequal relationship with an arrogant world power like the United States.

Given who Engracia is, how she is developed, and who is playing her, it is hardly surprising that she is the character with whom Borau most strongly identifies. For in making *Rio Abajo,* he was also affirming the possibilities of acculturation—willing to risk the dangers of infantilization, in order to learn the language of the commercial Hollywood cinema, without sacrificing his Hispanic pride, or his allegiance to his own national cinema, or his status as a highly accomplished professional. According to Kovacs, "Borau was trying to come to terms with the Spanish/English border as much as the Mexican/American border." Borau drew the analogy himself in "Without Weapons," where he predicted the American reaction to his film.

> Over a half century ago, motion pictures ceased being a poetic series of silent images without national identity. . . . Today's movies have not only a homeland but even a passport which the viewers demand to see whenever they sit down in the theater—or what's worse, even before they enter. They have become like those custom agents who have favourite countries whose visitors are received with a warm smile, and others which they find bothersome and suspect, and whose natives are promptly disinfected or vaccinated. As if this were not enough, if one of those unwelcomed foreigners claims to speak about their lives in their own language, the spectators—or rather, those who have set themselves up as their direct representatives, the distributors and critics—will ask the newcomer for his documents and will inspect his suitcases, concluding with an air of superiority, "No none of this is useful here. You don't understand what the distinguishing characteristics and idiosyncrasies of our people (they really mean 'audiences') are. We are special (they really mean 'superior'). Why don't you criticize your own country? You'd have enough to dig up there." (pp. 86–87)

Rather than continue to dwell on the beauties and flaws of *Rio Abajo,* which I find to be a fascinating yet uneven film, the rest of this essay will focus on what the reception to this work can tell us about the national-international interface in the post-Franco cinema.

The International Reaction to *Rio Abajo*

> *It's so ironic. In November of 1980, I was on the jury at the Chicago Film Festival with Claudia Cardinale, and we became friends. Werner Herzog came to see her to talk to her about doing* Fitzcarraldo. *At that time I already had the screenplay for* Rio Abajo, *and I had the money to do it, and the film* still *hasn't opened in the U.S. But* Fitzcarraldo, *the legendary problem film, has been made, released, argued about, and has become legendary. In* Fitzcarraldo *you can see the problems because they are dramatized in the plot, but in* Rio Abajo *you can't see them.*
>
> Borau, interview, June 1985

It is the common goal of Borau and of Spain's new socialist government to use cinema to restore Spain to the world stage. Ironically, as their primary European model they have chosen their old Franquist ally, Germany—not only because of all Western nations

it has been most successful in challenging the US economically, but also because it was so effective in using a modernist film movement of the seventies to help transform its tainted national image from that of a repressive fascist loser to that of a progressive democratic winner within postindustrial consumer capitalism.

When *Rio Abajo* was rejected at Berlin, Pilar Miró, Spain's General Director of Cinema at the time, wrote a strong letter of protest to one of the officials connected with the festival. Pointing to recent selections at the Cannes and San Sebastian festivals in 1984, she noted that Herzog's *Where the Green Ants Dream,* Wenders's *Paris, Texas,* and Schlöndorff's *Swann in Love* were all shown in competition as official German entries without anyone questioning *their* national identity. Yet, "All of these German films had a subject that was not specifically German and were shot outside of Germany with technical equipment and artists that were not for the most part German."[7] She also insists that "*Rio Abajo* is a Spanish film. The American coproducer [International Film Investors] withdrew when the production began, and it had to be taken over and totally financed by the Spanish producer José Luis Borau. It has Spanish actors and technicians, and its conception is Spanish." This glaring inequality of treatment leads her to ask with irony:

> Is the Spanish cinema condemned to try only typical Spanish subjects, to offer only the image that others have of our culture? We will make *Carmen,* but we will also make stories about subjects which we consider an interesting contribution from our point of view. We value, nowadays, whatever social, political, or cultural problematic of the world affects us. Or is it that we don't have anything to say about the situation of Latin Americans in relation to the United States?

The clear implication is that the fate of all films at international festivals and in the world market is largely determined by the position of their home nation in global politics—precisely the same point that Borau had made in his essay "Without Weapons" and which Buñuel had made earlier in his autobiography *Mon Dernier Soupir* in the following passage (which Borau used as an epigraph and from which he drew the title of his own essay):

> Steinbeck would be nothing without American weapons. I think the same is true of Dos Passos and Hemingway. If they had been born in Paraguay or in Turkey, who would read them now? A country's power determines who the great writers are. As a novelist Galdos is often on a par with Dostoevski, but who has heard of him outside of Spain? ("Without Weapons," p. 85)

Since joining the NATO alliance and the Common Market, Spain has been eager to take its place among other Western European nations and also to carefully maintain its independence from the imperialist policies of the United States in Latin America. Thus, the government's support of Borau's *Rio Abajo* has larger political implications, for the film presents an Hispanic perspective on the border issues and should therefore appeal to the Latin American market where Spain has always wanted to change its image and challenge Hollywood.

According to distinguished Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes (who was formerly Mexico's Ambassador to France, and who is now writing "The Buried Mirror," a television series on Spain and the Hispanic world being produced by the Smithsonian Institute and Channel 4 in London), Spain has already made considerable progress in changing its national image in Latin America.

> Throughout Spanish America, we used to see Spain and say: Look at that toothless hag, sitting on the church steps, reeking of incense and urine, dressed in rags and begging alms. We shrugged in resignation. We are as we are because Spain is what she is.
>
> No longer. Fifty years after the Battle of Spain, the lady is sleek, modern, beautiful and, we hope, willing to admit us into her bright new bedroom.[8]

Acknowledging that "perhaps no other country in Europe has been, to such a degree, the victim of foreign perceptions," Fuentes claims this perception began to change in his own nation when Mexican President "Lazaro Cardenas received almost 200,000 refugees from Franco's Spain . . . [who] revitalized our culture . . . [and] taught us that Spain had another tradition, a democratic tradition." Now in the post-Franco era, Fuentes predicts that "Spain can play a greater role in mitigating conflict between Latin America and the United States. It can even fill in many vacuums in current hemispheric relations."

Fully realizing that cinema is a powerful vehicle for changing a nation's image in the world, the new socialist government of Felipe Gonzalez has been vigorously promoting its

national cinema both at home and abroad.[9] Almost immediately after coming to power, the government symbolically signalled an end to all Fascist repression in the arts by appointing as Spain's General Director of Cinema Pilar Miró, whose controversial *El Crimen de Cuenca* (Crime of Cuenca, 1979) had been the object of the most glaring example of censorship and political harassment during the post-Franco transitional era. The government also immediately demonstrated its commitment to developing a strong national cinema by passing a new law offering Spanish film-makers advance loans up to fifty percent of the cost of production, a policy that enabled Borau to continue making movies despite his heavy financial losses on *Rio Abajo*. After José Luis Garci's *Volver a Empezar* won an Oscar for best foreign film in 1983, Spain's Ministry of Culture immediately followed up with a festival of Spanish films in New York. The films were accompanied by an expensive, handsomely produced catalogue, which provided not only promotional material on the films and their directors, but also a capsule history of Spanish cinema. In 1984 the Ministry of Culture published (both in Spanish and English) a more extensive 300-page film history called *Cine Español 1896-1983,* which includes essays by some of the most distinguished Spanish film scholars. In the Spanish version, the prologue (by José Luis Aranguren) ends by drawing the explicit parallel with the new German cinema: "Today, undoubtedly cinema is our great cultural creation, and constitutes not only a sum of great individual productions, but a real movement with its own style. In the present world, in the same manner that in another time the style of the French and Italian cinema were discussed, now one speaks with good reason of the German and the Spanish cinema." (p. 12)

Pilar Miró echoes the same point in her letter of protest concerning the unfair treatment of *Rio Abajo* by the Berlin Film Festival: "In spite of the difficulties, we will continue opening new roads like cineastes, looking for our place in the worldwide cinematographic panorama, as the German cinema does." She ends her letter by clearly showing (within the polite conventions of diplomacy) that the Spanish government stands firmly behind Borau and shares his indignation: "José Luis Borau has communicated to me that he cannot accept the kind offer that the committee made him of presenting his film at Berlin outside of competition, and, with all respect, I agree." These sentiments are also shared by Spain's current General Director of Cinema, Fernando Méndez-Leite, who is a former student and great admirer of Borau's and who reportedly regards *Rio Abajo,* not only as a Spanish film, but as the best of Borau's works.

Although I still think that Borau's greatest film to date is *Furtivos,* I applaud his courageous move in venturing out into new international territory with *Rio Abajo,* particularly at this stage in Spain's cinematic and political history. Borau seriously challenges the common assumption held by most film historians that in order for a film to have international appeal, it must move deep into national specificity. Borau claims that this "is the ultimate pacifier devised to calm the creative urges of disinherited authors (you know, the ones from the countries without weapons)." (p. 89) Yet he, and others who follow this international path, still have to consider not only what happened in West Germany—how popular international *auteurs* (like Fassbinder, Wenders, Herzog and Schlöndorff) succeeded in helping to change their nation's image at the same time they interrogated Hollywood codes—but also what happened in that other impressive national film movement of the seventies, the Australian new wave where talented film-makers (like Weir, Schepisi, Beresford and Armstrong) succeeded in overcoming their "cultural cringe" but also led the way to "cultural erasure" by becoming transformed into conventional Hollywood directors.

For Borau this path no longer poses such a threat; his experience with *Rio Abajo* would make such a development impossible. Moreover, from its very inception, *Rio Abajo,* like all of Buñuel's films made in exile, still clearly retained a strong Hispanic perspective. Even if it should fail to get the kind of enthusiastic response in foreign markets that it received at home in Spain, and even if it brought Borau years of personal suffering, the film still promises to prove important in expanding the boundaries of post-Franco Spanish cinema. Surely it is a *Spanish* film worthy of

worldwide distribution and of international critical attention. It is also an illuminating case study for understanding the national-international interface of world cinema in the eighties.

NOTES

1. Quoted by Manuel Hidalgo in *Carlos Saura* (Madrid: Ediciones JC., 1981), p. 81. The translation is my own.
2. Quoted from a lecture Borau gave at the University of Southern California on April 14, 1982. I previously cited this quote in an article entitled, "The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Spring 1983), pp. 58-59.
3. Ronald Schwartz, *Spanish Film Directors (1950-1985): 21 Profiles.* Metuchen, NJ and London: Scarecrow Press, 1986, p. 43.
4. Roger Mortimore, "Reporting from Madrid," *Sight and Sound* (August 1980).
5. Vicente Molina-Foix, *Fotogramas,* n. 1. 703 (December, 1984), p. 82; and Augustin Sanchez Vidal, "Una meditacion sobre las patrias ('Hay que mata a B', de José Luis Borau)," *Artigrama,* N. 1 (1984), p. 359.
6. José Luis Borau, "Without Weapons," (translated by Katherine S. Kovacs), Special Issue on New Spanish Cinema, ed. Katherine S. Kovacs, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Spring, 1983), p. 89. All future references to this essay will be noted in the text.
7. This quotation from Pilar Miró and all that follow are taken from an unpublished letter to Mr. D. Moritz DeHadeln, dated November 7, 1984, a copy of which was made available to me by Borau. The translation is my own.
8. Carlos Fuentes, "A Glory Seldom Seen: *Spain* a Nation Recovers Its Open, Democratic Tradition," *Los Angeles Times* (Sunday, August 3, 1986), Part V, 1.
9. To stimulate more attention from American scholars, the Spanish government (in cooperation with the Institute of Cinema and Television at the University of Valencia) made available to the USC School of Cinema-Television a collection of seventy video tapes of recent Spanish features, to be made accessible to other scholars and students throughout the States. This year (1986) the Ministry of Culture financed a second Festival of Spanish films in New York, and a longer dual festival at the UCLA Film Archive in Los Angeles—a program of post-1982 Spanish films and a Saura retrospective along with a highly prestigious tribute to Saura by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Apparently such high-powered promotional efforts are starting to pay off, for most of the screenings in the dual Los Angeles festival were sold out. Similar efforts are being pursued in other parts of the world. For example, the British Film Institute is currently presenting a comprehensive film series on Spanish cinema (extending from June to November 1986) and publishing a new book by John Hopewell titled *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema after Franco.*

Reviews

A GREAT WALL

Director: Peter Wang. Producer: Shirley Sun. Script: Peter Wang and Shirley Sun. Photography: Peter Stein and Robert Primes. Music: David Liang and Ge Ganru. Orion Classics.

DIM SUM

Director: Wayne Wang. Producers: Tom Sternberg, Danny Yung, Wayne Wang. Story: Laureen Chew, Terrel Seltzer, Wayne Wang. Photography: Michael Chin. Music: Todd Boekelheide. Orion Classics.

Since well before the filming of *Birth of a Nation,* the portrayal of racial and ethnic difference has been a critical issue for the mass media with implications for the culture as a whole. Racist attitudes and practices within the society and the media industry itself serve as the basis for their own regeneration in a self-perpetuating cycle of representation. With regard to the portrayal of Asians, little more than surface alterations occur between Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919), the *Charlie Chan* series of the thirties, and *Year of the Dragon* (1986). The Chinese remain alien, mysterious and often threatening.

The underlying problem is central to a function of the goals of mass media as they have developed in western society; these aim at establishing a common language and imagery able to subsume all regional, ethnic and class identities within a nationalist discourse. Industry practice exerts powerful hegemonic controls that draw all differences into a centralized ideological framework. This very dynamic, however, presupposes the existence of oppositional tendencies in the culture that move toward diversity and difference. These tendencies may be seen as analogous to what Bakhtin has theorized in linguistic terms as heteroglossia—diverse "languages" or styles that subvert the hegemony of the dominant language. With regard to film, the hegemonic process operates both at the formal level of filmic conventions and at the level of content or culturally defined experience. The critical question thus arises of where any meaningful intervention can be made in the dominant media. Can the cultural hegemony implicit in the medium of film be countered from a minority position, particularly given the demands of the marketplace?

Two recent films, *Dim Sum* (1985) by Wayne Wang and *A Great Wall* (1986) by

worldwide distribution and of international critical attention. It is also an illuminating case study for understanding the national-international interface of world cinema in the eighties.

NOTES

1. Quoted by Manuel Hidalgo in *Carlos Saura* (Madrid: Ediciones JC., 1981), p. 81. The translation is my own.
2. Quoted from a lecture Borau gave at the University of Southern California on April 14, 1982. I previously cited this quote in an article entitled, "The Children of Franco in the New Spanish Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Spring 1983), pp. 58-59.
3. Ronald Schwartz, *Spanish Film Directors (1950-1985): 21 Profiles.* Metuchen, NJ and London: Scarecrow Press, 1986, p. 43.
4. Roger Mortimore, "Reporting from Madrid," *Sight and Sound* (August 1980).
5. Vicente Molina-Foix, *Fotogramas,* n. 1. 703 (December, 1984), p. 82; and Augustin Sanchez Vidal, "Una meditacion sobre las patrias ('Hay que mata a B', de José Luis Borau)," *Artigrama,* N. 1 (1984), p. 359.
6. José Luis Borau, "Without Weapons," (translated by Katherine S. Kovacs), Special Issue on New Spanish Cinema, ed. Katherine S. Kovacs, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Spring, 1983), p. 89. All future references to this essay will be noted in the text.
7. This quotation from Pilar Miró and all that follow are taken from an unpublished letter to Mr. D. Moritz DeHadeln, dated November 7, 1984, a copy of which was made available to me by Borau. The translation is my own.
8. Carlos Fuentes, "A Glory Seldom Seen: *Spain* a Nation Recovers Its Open, Democratic Tradition," *Los Angeles Times* (Sunday, August 3, 1986), Part V, 1.
9. To stimulate more attention from American scholars, the Spanish government (in cooperation with the Institute of Cinema and Television at the University of Valencia) made available to the USC School of Cinema-Television a collection of seventy video tapes of recent Spanish features, to be made accessible to other scholars and students throughout the States. This year (1986) the Ministry of Culture financed a second Festival of Spanish films in New York, and a longer dual festival at the UCLA Film Archive in Los Angeles—a program of post-1982 Spanish films and a Saura retrospective along with a highly prestigious tribute to Saura by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Apparently such high-powered promotional efforts are starting to pay off, for most of the screenings in the dual Los Angeles festival were sold out. Similar efforts are being pursued in other parts of the world. For example, the British Film Institute is currently presenting a comprehensive film series on Spanish cinema (extending from June to November 1986) and publishing a new book by John Hopewell titled *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema after Franco.*

Reviews

A GREAT WALL

Director: Peter Wang. Producer: Shirley Sun. Script: Peter Wang and Shirley Sun. Photography: Peter Stein and Robert Primes. Music: David Liang and Ge Ganru. Orion Classics.

DIM SUM

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Two recent films, *Dim Sum* (1985) by Wayne Wang and *A Great Wall* (1986) by

A
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WALL

Peter Wang (no relation to Wayne), stand out as attempts to confront the endemic racism of the dominant cinema by presenting an insider's view of what it is to be Chinese-American. The two films adopt very different textual strategies in respect to subject position and narrative structure, reflecting their respective cultural determinants and the operations of ideology. Both films were independently produced; *A Great Wall* is the first US–Chinese coproduction to come from the opening of trade and diplomatic relations between this country and the People's Republic of China. *Dim Sum* was funded through CIM Production (named after Wang's first feature, *Chan Is Missing,* 1983), a small organization oriented toward Asian-American films. Wayne Wang grew up in Hong Kong, but spent the second half of his life in the US, including studies at the California College of Arts and Crafts. Peter Wang, born in Beijing, came to the US as a student, earning a Ph.D. in electro-optics. At the Asian Living Theatre in San Francisco, he began writing and directing plays as well as acting. (He plays an acting teacher in the recent Hong Kong film *Ah Ying.*)

Wayne Wang's original title, *The Great Wall is a great wall,* recalls President Nixon's comment upon his visit to China in 1972. The film expands upon the implications of that visit, which signalled the reopening of relations that had been long closed and the beginnings of trade and cultural exchange—exemplified at the time by Coca-Cola and Ping Pong. One signification of *A Great Wall* is that of a barrier to be broken or transgressed. The literal wall itself is also treated ambiguously, as both cultural artifact and boundary. As Leo Fang (Peter Wang) explains to his wife, "It was intended to stop the invaders from the north."

"Did it?" she asks.

"No, they came from the south."

In this film they come from the west, in the form of television, designer clothes, opportunity and abundant cash. The drama of this film lies in the contest between two cultures. The Fang family's visit to China to rediscover their ancient heritage becomes an advertisement for the American way of life set in an exotic locale. The structure of the narrative becomes a competition that culminates in a table tennis match between the American and a Chinese youth. While the American is bested in the sport, the cultural wave of the future seems clear. The film evokes a nostalgia for the traditional China while insisting on the inevitability of its extinction.

The most interesting thing about *A Great Wall* is the glimpses it offers of life in Beijing. The location is frankly presented as spectacle —the streets contrasting ancient and modern

A Great Wall

architecture, the people, parks, musicians and the Great Wall itself winding across the mountains—a spectacle so rich it threatens to engulf the narrative played upon its surface, were it not that the narrative constructs a competition of sub-spectacles of cultural oppositions whose polarities are established within the opening sequence.

The film opens in a men's public bath with a display of steamy and vulnerable nakedness representing the old China. This is followed by shots of streets filled with bicycles and then a tranquil household courtyard garden where a middle-aged man practices the meditative art of Tai Chi. The insistence of these shots on an enduring traditional "otherness" is disrupted in quick succession. Two teenage boys who work at the baths race out to spend their money on Coca-Cola; a girl singled out among the bicyclists talks to her friend about their English class; moments later she disrupts the peace of the man in the garden as she rides in and throws down her bike, with no sign of respect for elders. The true source of these disruptions is suggested as the scene shifts, first to the modern offices of a Silicon Valley computer firm, where Leo Fang quits his job in anger at being passed over for a promotion (for what seem racist reasons) and then to the Fang home which displays the counter-spectacle of American middle-class opulence.

The scenes of China bear the traces of the previous work as documentarists of producer Shirley Sun and director Peter Wang—*Old Treasures of New China* (1977) and parts of the PBS series *Cities of China* (1980); the film is to some extent a travelogue of Beijing, now motivated within a narrative. Impulsively, Fang packs his family off to China for a vacation. For him it is a journey home to visit his sister and to rediscover his cultural heritage—a quest for self-definition. For his wife Grace (Sharon Iwai) and his son Paul (Kelvin Han Yee), who portray second- or third-generation Americans, it is a visit to a foreign land where they are tourists.

Much of the humor in *A Great Wall* arises from the splash these Americans make with their affluence, brash behavior and individualism in the more tranquil and communally oriented society in Beijing. Neighbors gather around the courtyard of the Chao family home to witness the arrival of the visitors, whom they do not recognize as Chinese. "Are they Filipino?" puzzles one. The story develops as a comedy of manners built around the cultural conflict inherent in the two ways of life. The younger generation of Chinese, represented by Lili Chao (Li Qin Qin) and her friends, is powerfully attracted by Western ways, but as individuals find problems in following them. Leo Fang is totally American in his manner, yet able to draw much nourishment from the traditional culture. He returns to America with a wealth of artifacts and a new cultural identity signified by his practice of Tai Chi, which now distinguishes him among his colleagues—and perhaps helps bring the sought promotion.

Dim Sum presents a more intimate drama, concerning the relationship between a mother and daughter. The cultural conflicts are internalized and operate through the complexities of affection and duty within the family. This film also draws upon documentary style, but one closer to ethnography than travelogue. Mrs. Tam is the fictionalized character of Kim Chew, who plays herself—a widow now who left China as a young woman to marry an immigrant already in the US. She and her daughter Geraldine (Laureen Chew) share a house in San Franciso's Richmond district, and are part of a community of upwardly mobile Chinese who have moved out of Chinatown. Uncle Tam (Victor Wong), who helps to support his sister-in-law, still lives in Chinatown where he runs a neighborhood bar. The comedy arises in part from a fictional premise. Mrs. Tam believes that she will die at age 62, having been told this by a fortune-teller when she was a young girl. Now at that age, she is

concerned to fulfill her parental obligations by getting her daughter married. Geraldine resists; American-born and independent, she is determined that her marriage should be her own decision. But she also fears that if she marries her mother will be left alone with no one to look after her. The humor of two people at cross-purposes over one another's welfare ripples outward as they complain or maneuver, often through friends and relatives rather than confronting one another directly —a process not unique to Asian-Americans.

While differences in language, food and custom are highlighted and given a gently comic twist, they are all grounded in personal and family issues so that the humor is understood within a context of intimacy. Uncle Tam's fear that the traditional Chinese dishes that are so dear to his heart and palate will die with Mrs. Tam's generation spurs his interest in learning to cook, or better in finding a wife who can do it—perhaps Mrs. Tam herself. His concern resonates with our own when he and Geraldine fail in their efforts to cook and end up at McDonald's.

Both *A Great Wall* and *Dim Sum* challenge a major convention of the dominant Hollywood cinema that has demanded a standard language. Like a number of other independent feature films which draw their material from regional and ethnic subcultures in the US (*Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, Angelo, My Love*) these films are bilingual and require subtitling for American audiences. Language also figures significantly in the narrative of each. In *A Great Wall,* language is a major part of the barrier, which the mainland young people struggle to tear down by learning English. Lili's Chinese boyfriend Liu (Wang Xiao) recites for her the Gettysburg Address in some of the most fractured English imaginable. The humor underscores the importance of the language for upward mobility. Both Lili and Liu are studying for the yearly college entrance exam which will determine their educational and career possibilities. Paul Fang on the other hand is casually disdainful of learning Chinese, even to please his father. He introduces the word "privacy" into the conceptual world of his cousin Lili, becoming incensed when he notes that her mother reads her mail. She eagerly uses the word as a wedge against her parents, a move which ultimately proves

Laureen and Kim Chew in DIM SUM

disastrous for her. When her boyfriend Liu complains that she spends all her time with her American cousin, she assails him with the word as well. Liu in turn hurls it at his father, who has diligently tutored them both in English. "Privacy," yells Liu, "Privacy—it can't be translated!"

Translators are crucial figures in cross-cultural films such as these. Leo Fang is our point of entry into the cultural world of Beijing, as interpreter for his family and seeker for his own identity. He finds points of reference for us in his experiences of hunting grasshoppers as a child that he relates to Lili and in his conversations with his brother-in-law Mr. Chao (Hu Xiao Guang) about how to tell when you're drunk, or the behavior of wives during menopause. In *Dim Sum* Geraldine, who is American-born and perfectly bilingual, becomes our guide to understanding her mother—in terms both of language and behavior. Mrs. Tam is often silent as the camera dwells upon her in mundane tasks and private moments of reflection. Some of her actions can be read at face value as she sews or gardens; others have hidden dimensions. When she unwraps the dresses she has stored away, it is through Geraldine that we understand their significance—one is her wedding dress; the other is for her funeral. Both arouse Geraldine's deepest qualms, but to the unassisted viewer would be inexplicable. A scene in which Mrs. Tam sorts through some photographs of her jewelry from China might be passed over as a sign of her alien nature, or simply an old woman's dottiness. It takes on other meaning when Geraldine confides her perception of the event to her sister—conveying both alarm and exasperation with her mother's foolishness in noting on the back of

each photo who is to receive it when she dies. The gap revealed between the mother's purpose and Geraldine's response helps the viewer understand the position of an alien who must improvise with all available means to negotiate her way in an adopted culture.

Mrs. Tam speaks almost no English, and though she is attempting to learn, it is only to earn American citizenship before she travels to visit her homeland and pay her last respects. Her home remains a place where Chinese is spoken along with some broken English, particularly among her friends who gather to play Mah Jongg. Language defines her community, preserving and protecting certain traditions and values. It is a space that is neither Chinese nor American, but a world in between.

Both *Dim Sum* and *A Great Wall* reflect a multiplicity of cultural positions, but take a different stance regarding them. Leo Fang discovers he cannot go home again, leaving his frustrations with American racism and his job, to rejoin the traditional culture of his youth in China. The older culture is itself in transition, a process whose determinants lie internally with economic and cultural revolution and externally with the Western influences that he himself embodies. The sight of modern high-rises or a group of neighbors gathered in their courtyard to watch a single television do not bode well for traditional ways. The respect for Fang's specialized knowledge and skills with computers, which at first seems a gratifying recognition—filling the lack he felt in his job—is diminished almost to the point of absurdity when recontextualized within the limits of China's less developed technology and heavy bureaucracy.

The implications of Fang's situation are not really developed within the film. Instead his search for identity and difference becomes the means of his reintegration into the dominant culture of the US, a reaffirmation of democratic ideals, the melting pot, individualism and competition. Little depth of personality or relationship is developed within the narrative. This is particularly true of the Chinese characters. The story moves toward a predictable set of outcomes. Were it not for the fact that the players and setting are Chinese, the film would be hard to distinguish from a standard American sit-com with Lili as the misunderstood teenager, her father a kindly buffoon and the mother/housekeeper as mediator of middle-class family harmony. Thus, whether deliberately or not, on the level of narrative convention cultural differences are subsumed into the terms of American mainstream media.

This is not the case with *Dim Sum*. Wayne Wang does not hesitate to dwell upon his characters and to allow deeper feelings to surface. The story, for all its lighthearted humor around death, does not ignore its serious side. Wang treats death as a fact of life, contrasting Geraldine's fears with the real experience of her friend Julia (Cora Miao). Julia recounts how her whole family made the trek to Hong Kong when her mother was sick and not expected to live.

"How was it?" asks Geraldine.

"You know, we all sat around a few days eating and playing cards. Then we decided she wasn't going to die after all, so we went home."

Her casual words belie the profound grief that overcomes her when news of her mother's death reaches her a few days later. Even Uncle Tam's cheery warmth fades at one point, as he dresses for a birthday dinner Mrs. Tam has planned for him. Alone in his tiny apartment, he studies his face in the mirror while he cleans his denture—acknowledging his age and the certainty of death. But the film does not become caught in pathos. For Wang, loss is to be accepted and moved through to a new beginning. When Uncle Tam leaves the mirror he walks through the streets of Chinatown filled with the life of people and music. He proposes marriage once again to Mrs. Tam, and is once more refused (surely not for the last time).

Wang uses locations and spaces to allow the viewer entrance into the emotional lives of his characters. He provides a sense of place in the misty sunlight and hilly streets of San Francisco, the close-standing houses and narrow yards where neighbors can converse across the clotheslines. He frames his characters in private spaces, some of which tell their own stories with photographs and memorabilia.

"I've always seen the environment as basically like a separate character that contains all the people that move through the story, their experience," says Wang. Thus his narrative

evolves through action and stasis, resulting in an understanding of the characters that goes beyond their immediate situation.

Dim Sum's style is presentational in the sense defined by Noël Burch as the "oriental mode of expression." The camera remains static. Each shot is meticulously composed by cinematographer Michael Chin, and held for effect. Wang does not attempt to create a continuous flow of action. Rejecting a shot/reverse shot structure, he moves the narrative forward through the accumulation of shots—a montage of alternating interactions and stillness in which people are linked by moments shared as well as moments of solitude or emptiness. Wang's use of the "empty shot" has several functions. His spaces are collectors of emotion. In the "empty shot" the mind of the viewer is present. In the words of a character in *Chan Is Missing,* "What's not there is just as important as what is there."

The characters in *Dim Sum* are also defined by cultural reference points that open up the self-reflexive realm of the film. Auntie Mary (Ida F. O. Chung), who lives next door and visits with Mrs. Tam over the back fence and at the Mah Jongg table, is a *Dynasty* fan. Mrs. Tam watches Hong Kong soap opera. When Geraldine's fiancé Richard (John Nishio) comes to visit, he watches Kung Fu movies. Uncle Tam reminisces about the wonderful movies he saw as a youth. Capra's *You Can't Take It with You* was one of his favorites. "The family was so wonderful," he says, "always loving and hugging one another." His nostalgia resonates curiously with the film we are watching in which love operates as one tension among others and is not idealized. Capra's influence is still to be seen. The central dilemma of Mrs. Tam's impending death is suddenly and fortuitously resolved. Like Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life,* she returns from her trip to China magically renewed—by the same fortune-teller.

Much of Wayne Wang's success in this film lies in his approach to the material. His characters and situations in this case are drawn from the experience of the people involved, both actors and non-actors. Terrel Seltzer, who wrote the screenplays for both of Wang's films, but is not herself Chinese, describes the experience of constructing a script.

Victor Wong as Uncle Tam in Dim Sum

We did a lot of interviews. We talked to Laureen about the cake she gives her mother when the mother's friends are playing Mah Jongg. "What kinds of things would they say to you?" we asked her. It was out of those conversations that I found lines like, "When are we going to eat your cake, Geraldine?—the one that smells so sweet and makes your mama so happy." I couldn't make up lines like that. I don't know the idiom.

At the same time Seltzer feels that being outside the community is an advantage. "I don't think Wayne saw how interesting the Auntie Mary character is to people who don't speak Chinese. I love to listen to that kind of half-English, half-Pidgin talk. It's always so funny and heartwarming when friends are talking Chinese among themselves and suddenly there's a word of English and the listener 'gets' it."

Auntie Mary (Ida F. O. Chung), who is an actress from Hong Kong living in the US, brings that bilingual, bicultural dimension of herself to the role, as does Cora Miao as Julia. Victor Wong brings a personal dimension of himself to the character of Uncle Tam. "He has written memoirs of Chinatown—his history of growing up there," says Seltzer. "He's a sensitive, eccentric and colorful man who seems to have almost total recall of all the things he's ever done. The biggest temptation was to include it all."

What films like this accomplish—and this may in part explain why they are becoming increasingly popular with a broad audience, even while they retain a marginal status in relation to the dominant cinema—is to insist upon the cultural diversity that is overridden and lost in the dominant media.

—BROOKE JACOBSON

WORKING GIRLS

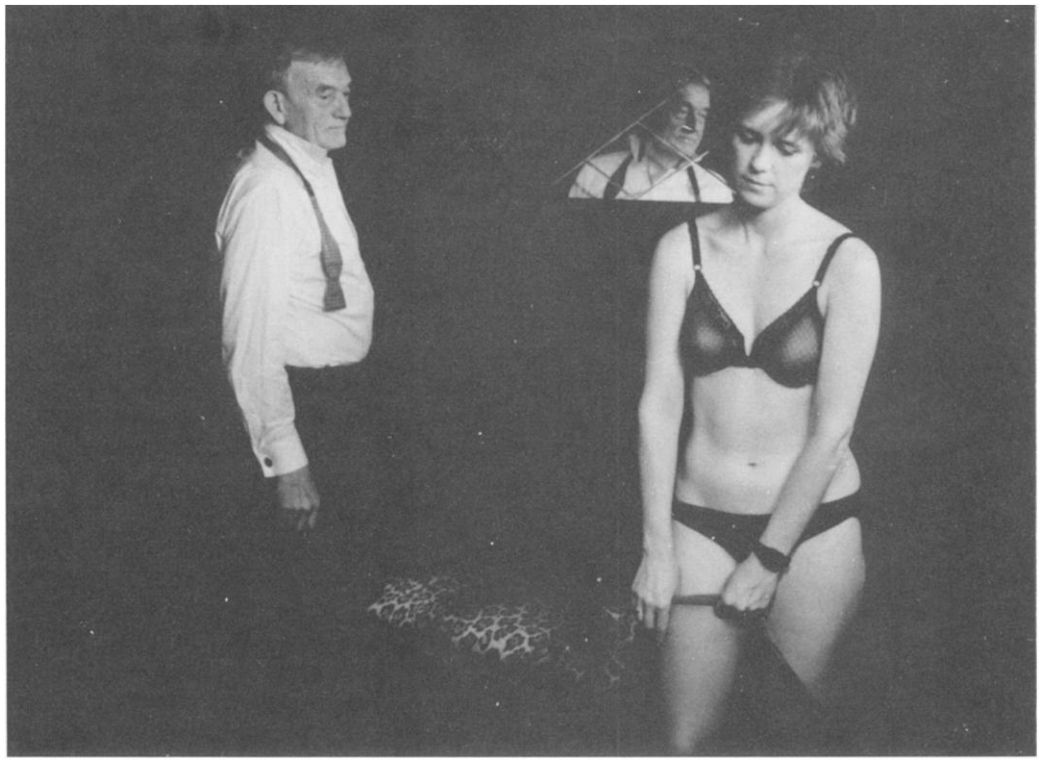
Lizzie Borden's new film is in many ways a step forward from her previous effort, *Born in Flames,* which was lavishly praised by some but roundly condemned by others for being a piece of unadulterated feminist wish-fulfillment. For example, at a workshop on the earlier film held at the 1985 Society for Cinema Studies conference in New York, some of the panelists seemed to find its science-fiction indulgence in the fantasy of a feminist revolutionary overthrow of the patriarchy to be politically naive, while others wanted to credit its energy and heartfelt enthusiasm despite its flaws. *Working Girls,* in any case, is very different. Most obviously, its production values and its commitment to realistic acting conventions, still minimal by Hollywood standards, are greatly enhanced. Yet the film could hardly be called slick.

In the tradition of Zolaesque naturalism, *Working Girls* is chiefly occupied with presenting a *tranche de vie* portrayal of one day in the life of a New York prostitute. Borden's move closer toward mainstream technique has not kept her from giving the viewer a strong sense of lived time, and she courageously allows an occasional *temps mort* to stand, which is of course anathema to everything Hollywood stands for. Since plot is minimal, the film never seems to be hurtling toward some preëstablished climax or resolution of tension: in fact, we never know what's going to happen next. The film is shot in a straightforward documentary style, head on, with no fancy camera work, yet it is not presented as incontrovertible truth, either. More conventional critics may find some of the acting performances less than "convincing," but Borden obviously wants to give us a sense of "authenticity" rather than realism, terms which are not, of course, synonymous.

In an apparent decision to avoid conventional stereotypes about prostitutes, here the "working girl" is a college graduate (of Yale, no less!) operating, with her colleagues, out of a very high-class Manhattan apartment. Interestingly, Borden has also chosen to make the protagonist a lesbian who is living with a black woman, stressing an expanded notion of what is "legitimate" female behavior, a concern already in evidence in *Born in Flames.* At one point, when an ardent customer plants a "hickey" on her neck, she must figure out a way to hide it, just like any adulterous heterosexual lover. In this way, her sexual life is, with great economy, made to seem more "normal" to heterosexuals in the audience. One of the other "girls" is a voluptuous, hilarious, gum-chewing student at a local college who tries to write term papers between tricks, and who provides much of the film's abundant humor.

For the most part, the clients are homely and maladroit, sometimes even slightly unsavory, but not all of them. More than a few are vaguely appealing, and even rather warm and generous; Borden only rarely engages in caricature. At least in the first part of the film, in fact, the attractive, dynamic, and for the most part classy and well-dressed women clearly have complete power over the nerdy, harmless Johns who come to the apartment regularly, beg to see them on the "outside," and whose only saving grace seems to be money enough to pay the high rates. Yet the threat of violence is always just below the surface, and Borden subtly shows who always has the real, final power in patriarchy, even in a place in which the women are ostensibly in charge. One encounter with an unpleasant foreigner who refuses to wash or wear a condom contains a frightening charge of submerged violence. Perhaps Borden's greatest accomplishment in this film is the way she conveys a powerful sense of danger without ever reverting to overblown Hollywood-style moments of murder and mayhem.

The women talk about their menstrual periods, they eat Big Macs, they complain about their boss (whom they shortchange by misreporting time spent with clients)—in short, all the usual "girl talk," even if it's from an unconventional perspective. At first,



WORKING GIRLS

and for a long time, it all just seems like another business, and not very alienating at all; in fact, an incredibly lucrative one, given the hundreds of dollars the women are actually able to make in a day. In this way, Borden shows once again the power of economic facts in a women's life.

They perform all kinds of different tricks: "light dominance," a "show" (two girls frolicking for the benefit of the male client), role playing (as when the Yale woman feigns the virginal patient for a weird doctor). The presence of a great deal of prostitute "lore" gives the impression that Borden did more than her share of homework before beginning the film. But then another problem arises. Can naked female bodies be shown performing sexual acts in a way that does not demean them even further, offering them as objects for the prurient male gaze? Somehow, Borden manages it. The context of these scenes is so completely economic, and the reminder so insistent that everything we see is cynical performance, that every trace of libido is removed from the sequences, except on the part of the vulnerable, foolish-looking males.

Perhaps Borden's most astute choice was to make the pimp a woman, a grasping, nouveau riche Manhattanite to boot, who is totally obsessed by money, jewelry and designer clothes, and who runs a very tight whorehouse indeed. She is the consummate businessperson, keeping everything operating smoothly, the customers pleased, the phone lines open, the house in tip-top shape. She is also unconsciously hilarious. In fact, the movie is funny throughout, as when the Yale girl goes to the pharmacy to load up on bulk supplies for her colleagues, and the amazed pharmacist says "You don't take any chances, do you?"

Lest we be too lulled by all of this hilarity, however, Borden brings in a new girl near the end of the film. The protagonist, a two-month "veteran," breaks her in, shows her the tricks of the trade, as it were; it all seems to be ridiculously easy. But the newcomer is thoroughly disgusted, and, seeing things through her as yet uncynical eyes, suddenly we are reawakened to what is actually going on here, and we wonder, with the Yale woman, whether *any* amount of money is worth what they have to go through.

Later, they throw a short birthday party, between tricks, for one of the other women, slightly older, who isn't as attractive to the customers as she once was. The effect is wonderfully ambivalent; they are showing affectionate camaraderie, which she appreciates, but she also knows that each birthday is a small death to someone living on her looks.

We understand, finally, and without speeches, how the entire system exists at the sufferance of men, no matter how dynamic and resourceful the women seem, and no matter how obviously superior they are to the men they service. This fact comes across most powerfully when a client turns a woman down for some reason—all is business, yes, and so the customer is always right, of course, but the rejections seem so cruel and violent that the audience gasps at the brutality a single word can carry.

The Manhattan madame becomes finally too pushy, too obnoxious. She manipulates the protagonist into staying at work long after she is due to leave for the day, and so she finally quits, even though she will not be able to make nearly as much money doing anything else. But, as another prostitute has pointed out to her earlier, she, as a college girl, has other choices, while the others don't. Again, economics as the foundation for the whole system of women's oppression. At the end, we see her riding off on her bicycle, presumably to rejoin her lover, enjoying the delicious freedom of movement that is in such complete contrast to the claustrophobia of the apartment. What will she and the other girls do next? We don't know. There's no fantasy wish-fulfillment in this film, just a stunning presentation of fact. —PETER BRUNETTE

FAMILY LIFE

(*La Vie de famille*) Directed by Jacques Doillon. Written by Doillon and Jean-François Goyet. Cinematography: Michel Carré and Jacques Monge. Edited by Nicole Dedieu. Coproduced by TF1 and Flach Film.

It is surprising to note that, although any number of second-string French directors (e.g., Claude Zidi) have had relatively wide exposure on the US foreign-film circuit, a major director such as Jacques Doillon is virtually unknown in this country. In feature film-making, Doillon started as an underground figure; his *L'An 01* is one of the rare cinematic reactions to the events in France of May 1968. *La Vie de famille,* which, like so much interesting work of late, was coproduced with French television, is his tenth film. His *La Drôlesse* won the *Prix du jeune cinéma*

FAMILY LIFE

at Cannes in 1979. His films have been much admired in the US by those who have seen them—but how many have seen them? Doillon needs a "breakthrough" film, a popular success. Unfortunately, *La Vie de famille* is a rigorously controlled, intimate family psychodrama that seems unlikely to warm the hearts of film reviewers for major newspapers. It was recently screened in New York City in the Perspectives on French Cinema series at the Museum of Modern Art. It will probably have some exposure elsewhere, mainly at archives and media centers.

Doillon is a kind of minimalist Pialat with a dash of Rivette thrown in—or perhaps the opposite. Perhaps such references make no sense at all when applied to such a strong personality, but the film that *La Vie de famille* most suggests to me is Rivette's *L'Amour fou.* It has the claustrophobic feeling of the latter film, even though it sets its deep psychological conflicts against warm color backgrounds (real locations, all) of the South of France and Northern Spain.

The film moves from a network of troubled family relations (two interlocking households linked by a middle-aged man played by Sami Frey, who is father and ex-husband to one house, stepfather and husband in another) to an intense exploration of the father-daughter relationship. The Frey character has a name—Jean-Louis Emmanuel—but he alone in the film almost never gets called by his name, a symptom of his status as the (covertly) identified Patient in the disturbed family relations explored by Doillon. His daughter Elise (Mara Goyet), who is 14 or 15 years old, seems to

We understand, finally, and without speeches, how the entire system exists at the sufferance of men, no matter how dynamic and resourceful the women seem, and no matter how obviously superior they are to the men they service. This fact comes across most powerfully when a client turns a woman down for some reason—all is business, yes, and so the customer is always right, of course, but the rejections seem so cruel and violent that the audience gasps at the brutality a single word can carry.

The Manhattan madame becomes finally too pushy, too obnoxious. She manipulates the protagonist into staying at work long after she is due to leave for the day, and so she finally quits, even though she will not be able to make nearly as much money doing anything else. But, as another prostitute has pointed out to her earlier, she, as a college girl, has other choices, while the others don't. Again, economics as the foundation for the whole system of women's oppression. At the end, we see her riding off on her bicycle, presumably to rejoin her lover, enjoying the delicious freedom of movement that is in such complete contrast to the claustrophobia of the apartment. What will she and the other girls do next? We don't know. There's no fantasy wish-fulfillment in this film, just a stunning presentation of fact. —PETER BRUNETTE

FAMILY LIFE

(*La Vie de famille*) Directed by Jacques Doillon. Written by Doillon and Jean-François Goyet. Cinematography: Michel Carré and Jacques Monge. Edited by Nicole Dedieu. Coproduced by TF1 and Flach Film.

It is surprising to note that, although any number of second-string French directors (e.g., Claude Zidi) have had relatively wide exposure on the US foreign-film circuit, a major director such as Jacques Doillon is virtually unknown in this country. In feature film-making, Doillon started as an underground figure; his *L'An 01* is one of the rare cinematic reactions to the events in France of May 1968. *La Vie de famille,* which, like so much interesting work of late, was coproduced with French television, is his tenth film. His *La Drôlesse* won the *Prix du jeune cinéma*

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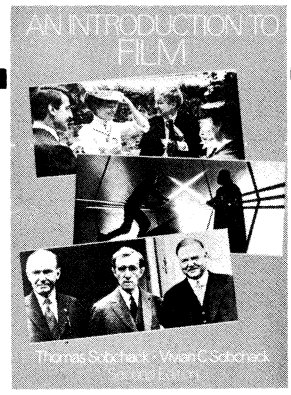
have been tacitly named the family's family therapist, though of course she doesn't really know how to proceed to untangle things. Elise has written a film scenario about a little boy (her father? herself?) who has lost his father and has a series of misadventures ending with a trip down a road marked "The End of the World." In her scenario the child walks out of camera range and is heard to say, "Oh, how wonderful!" though she specifies that the audience is not to know what the boy sees.

During one of his weekly visits, father and daughter set out to videotape Elise's story. Once they begin, there is frequent intercutting between the main film's 35mm images and the characters' video footage. This second textual level again recalls *L'Amour fou* in its extreme graininess, its distinct sonic characteristics, and the different relations established by the characters with the camera. Eventually the Frey character talks his daughter into going to Spain to finish the tape, although Elise hesitates because she doesn't want to miss school or disturb her mother—or her father's new wife. By the time they shoot the End of the World scene, on the father's insistence they abandon the scenario. In a hotel room in Madrid, they alternately record statements to the video camera destined for the other to see. Elise, tearful, says that her father taught her how to be distant, but that now he wants her to be close, but that it's too late. Reacting, the father says he *had* to teach her some distance, because little girls who stay too close to their fathers are not open to the world. It's as if he's talking to himself, too, or that she provokes him into saying this to himself in the guise of saying it to her.

After this confrontation, father and daughter seem to feel their troubled relationship as somewhat resolved. The implication is that the effects may even spread to his longstanding disturbed relations with the other women in his life. (He is a compulsive potentially sadistic womanizer.) Neither the audience nor the characters knows for sure whether any real change has occurred, however, and as he puts Elise on a plane to send her quickly home, she calls out to her father, "Until next Saturday."

Doillon's cinematic style is controlled and unobtrusive. There is relatively little cutting within scenes, and a great deal of adroit camera movement. Sound recording is always



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La Vie de famille is an intense work, and many viewers will find it tough to watch. Its subject matter does not make for a pleasant night out at the movies. I was still somewhat shaken by it for more than a day after the screening. I found myself insisting on telling people the film's story, trying to make sense of why it was so moving to me. Anyone who thinks that French cinema has currently lost its old drive and impact should go see this film. Anyone who wishes for a contemporary cinema of greater range, that takes more risks than we have come to expect at the movies, even at the art-house circuit, should see it. *La Vie de famille* is one of the most compelling pieces of film-making I've seen in a long time. —ALAN WILLIAMS

SIGNAL—GERMANY ON THE AIR

Most of Ernie Gehr's *Signal—Germany on the Air* consists of shots of a particular intersection of streets in Berlin. Almost invariably there is a lamppost or some other prominent obstruction in the foreground, as if the film-maker had been anxious to conceal himself from view. "Gehr films the streets as if they were the scene of a crime," wrote J. Hoberman in his *Village Voice* review of the film. In a discussion after the recent Boston première, Gehr edited Hoberman's assessment: there was, he said, no "as if" about it.

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Signal is a film that operates almost entirely on the basis of overtones and resonances; nothing is said, everything is implied. Aside from the street scenes, there are some images of factories and railroad sidings. The sound consists of street noise and radio programs. In these everyday images of the present the crimes of the past can be seen.

It requires only a little push from Gehr to attune us to the resonances. A few minutes into the film, there is a series of shots which establish an open space in the foreground. Among them are several shots of an industrial area. In these shots, a somewhat weathered sign appears at the edge of the foreground clearing, at first too far away to read. The sign advises us in four languages that we are standing on the site of a Gestapo torture camp.

This single explicit reference is enough to suffuse the film with a quiet horror. Under Gehr's eye, the streets reveal themselves as a façade, inadequate to sustain the weight of the past they must, but cannot, conceal.

Gehr conjures the past with his sound track, which is at times quite pointed. In excerpts from a radio program, apparently intended to teach the English language, a man and a woman exchange accusations of guilt.

Generally, sound and image operate independently; synchronous events are mostly on the order of subtle inflections. There are exceptions. Immediately after a line in a radio play about peeping through a window, the screen goes white. The whiteness is the flare of light at the beginning of a camera roll. The image which flickers through the flare, of a railroad car on a siding, would be, in another context, wholly innocent; here, the implications are inescapable. The shot is ironically framed by the window referred to on the sound track.

It will be evident to those who are familiar with Gehr's work that this film is something of a departure. He is perhaps best known for *Serene Velocity* (1970), a film of an empty hallway.The film's intense rhythms are created by the alternation of brief shots at increasingly disparate focal lengths. Gehr became known as a "structural" film-maker; like most of

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A long sequence at the end of *Signal* was shot in the rain. This is almost comforting. The subdued colors of an overcast day seem more appropriate than the bright, saturated colors of the storefronts earlier in the film. It seems for a while as though the rain can wash away all traces of the past. But, when a bright orange flare-out signals both the end of a camera roll and the end of the film, the steady hiss of the rain reveals itself as the roaring of a conflagration.

—HARVEY NOSOWITZ

Controversy & Correspondence

A SALT AND BATTERY

We have no desire to intervene in a dispute between an author and his reviewer, especially when his reviewer was also once his editor. But as we are virtually the only members of the community of American film academics whom Barry Salt mentions by name in his reply to Ernest Callenbach, and as we are dragged into Salt's diatribe as instances of "dishonesty and dirty tricks," we feel compelled to offer a response of our own.

Salt accuses our portions of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (written with Janet Staiger) of borrowing from his work without crediting him. He claims that we take up his "general approach" of examining stylistic norms. Salt will be surprised to learn that he did not originate the idea of studying norms, it being a commonplace of Russian Formalist poetics, Prague Structuralist semiotics, and art-historical research generally. Our citations in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* are to E. H. Gombrich, Jan Mukařovský, and Roman Jakobson, among others. But perhaps Salt will claim that these writers stole from him as well. In any event, we have been using the concept of stylistic norms in our own work for over a decade, beginning in our article, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Yasujiro Ozu," written in 1975 and published in *Screen* in 1976—the same year as Salt's *Film Form* article, from which he accuses us of cribbing.

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well's *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (p. 237), published by the same University of California Press that Salt now despises. A couple of brief citations of Salt in our *Wide Angle* (5, 3) article "Linearity, Materialism and the Study of the Early American Cinema" are completely neutral, except for the expression of some surprise that Salt would use the term "Missing Link" in promoting Reginald Barker. No; one must read Salt's attacks on various authors, editors, reviewers, and presses to learn what "denigratory" really means.

Salt then virtually accuses Thompson of having stolen the examples, ideas, and even the organization of her section of our book from his 1976 *Film Form* (1, 1) article, "The Early Development of Film Form." Thompson's chapters, he asserts, tell "the same story" as does that article. Aside from the patent absurdity of the notion that a text equivalent in length to a small book could be taken in detail from thirteen pages of Salt's prose, the accusations are completely false. Salt states that Thompson "uses exactly the same previously unknown films" he discussed in the *Film Form* article. Let's do a bit of what Salt claims to do so well—counting. He refers to about 66 titles from the pre-1918 period in that article; Thompson cites about 118 films from the same period in her chapters. Of these, 25 are the same titles. Of *those,* a fair proportion are such previously unknown films as *The Birth of a Nation, The Cheat, A Corner in Wheat, The Great Train Robbery,* etc. Moreover, only seven are used to make the same point about the same scene. In two cases, Thompson does refer to Salt as having originated the examples—when Salt was indeed their originator. (See p. 209, "Barry Salt has pointed out an early example of shot/reverse shot in *The Loader* . . ."; p. 274, "Barry Salt has found a number of early films which use arc lamps . . ."; other citations of Salt by Thompson are: p. 438, fn. 2; p. 442, fn. 24; p. 443, fns. 16 and 22; p. 444, fn. 35; and p. 453, fn. 44.) In four of the seven cases, Salt was not the first to point out the device and hence was not footnoted (e.g., the cut-in in *The Gay Shoe Clerk,* close framings in *The Widow and the Only Man*). Indeed, in a number of cases, Salt's examples duplicate those of Kemp Niver's 1968 book, *The First Twenty Years* (e.g., *A Search for Evidence, The Story the Biograph Told*), yet Salt does not do *him* the courtesy of giving him a single footnote or mention. (Thompson does refer to Niver's book.) For all one could tell from *Film Style & Technology,* barely anyone had ever written on early filmic devices before Salt. The only case in which Thompson uses a Salt-originated example without citing him is a shot from *A Friendly Marriage* (1911), where a woman sits in the foreground with her back to the camera. Since Salt saw this film at the National Archive, which at that time had it incorrectly catalogued as *Love's Awakening* (1910), under which title Salt discussed it, Thompson did not notice the identity of the two examples until later; she had used a correctly identified print at the Library of Congress. Admittedly, both Salt and Thompson use *Her First Adventure* (1908) as an example of crosscutting, but since Salt incorrectly claimed this to be the first use of crosscutting, Thompson felt it unnecessary to cite him. (Both Thompson and Salt independently saw *The 100-to-One Shot* [1906], currently the earliest *known* case of crosscutting, and this film figures in both their books—though not in Salt's *Film Form* article.)

All this leaves us with approximately 93 films of the pre-1918 period which Thompson cites and Salt does not, and 41 which only Salt mentions. "*Exactly* the same previously unknown films," Mr. Salt? Some titles used by Thompson but not by Salt include: *At Old Fort Dearborn, The Bandit of Tropico, Behind the Footlights, The Bells, Broncho Billy and the Greaser,* and *Brother Man,* with the list continuing through the alphabet.

A certain degree of overlap is inevitable, because Salt and Thompson visited some of the same major archives, and archives have limited numbers of titles from this period available as viewing prints. But more importantly, Thompson often uses the duplicated titles for different purposes. For example, Salt draws upon the 1914 *Detective Burton's Triumph* for examples of match on action and lack of dialogue titles, while *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* discusses its remarkable, extended shot/reverse-shot scene. The same is true for most of the titles cited by both authors.

Finally, it should be noted that Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson were doing their archival film viewing at the same time that Salt was watching films used to expand his previous work into his book.

Salt also says that Thompson "tells the same story" of the early cinema that he does. But where is Salt's equivalent of Thompson's extended comparison of narrative forms, based on examinations of early scenario manuals and comparable playwriting, novel, and short-story manuals? Does he discuss goal-oriented protagonists, deadlines, and the like? Most crucially, he does not use *any* of the same arguments that Thompson does—about narration, the spectator's relation to the playing space, the disruptive qualities of early editing, the dramaturgical functions of backlighting, and so on and on. Thompson does not in fact organize her section chronologically as a "story," but by large-scale topics—quite different from Salt's randomly ordered small-scale sections which overall *are* organized in strictly chronological fashion. (Given Salt's lack of arguments concerning causal connections among his atoms of data, his book does not add up to a story, either—only a chronicle.)

Finally, Salt accuses Thompson of being unable even to steal his material efficiently—she often "gets it seriously wrong." This is mere assertion again, as he gives no examples. He does criticize a 1919 article from the *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* on lighting, calling it "years out of date in its recommendations." Yet this is irrelevant, since Thompson does not employ

the *Transactions* article for direct stylistic evidence or for the author's "recommendations," but only for one mention of the number of arc lamps owned by the Vitagraph studios—something that no one, even Salt, could tell simply by looking at the films. Moreover, Salt's complaint is wholy *ex cathedra,* since he offers no counter-evidence. And if Salt is so skeptical about the *Transactions* as a source, why is it one of the only two journals (along with *The American Cinematographer*) that he used for "the basic research" (p. 381) on technology in his own book? We investigated a great variety of contemporary documents, most of which Salt ignored in his own research, and we checked our data against various sources. Salt himself, through a lack of print sources, occasionally dates major technological innovations years too late, as with the Bell & Howell all-metal camera and the Sunlight Arc. (For evidence of this, see our forthcoming review of *Film Style & Technology.*)

It is ironic that Salt should accuse us of not acknowledging sources, when *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* probably has one of the highest proportions of footnotes to text of any book ever

In the Service of the State

The Cinema of Alexander Dovzhenko

Vance Kepley, Jr.

Alexander Dovzhenko is one of the original masters of the Soviet cinema during the classic period from 1920 to 1945. Opportunities to view his films, which reflect his Ukranian peasant background, are rare in this country. Vance Kepley's skillful analysis of nine existing films of Dovzhenko advances a new thesis about the filmmaker's work and represents the first comprehensive study of them in English.

The prevailing Western view of Dovzhenko's work has been that he was the cinematic equivalent of a romantic poet, dominated by a pastoral vision of life, and embodying ahistorical and timeless themes within his films. Kepley contends that Dovzhenko's films were not simply projections of personal and private visions, but that they refer to their historical settings and are highly topical. By examining each film in its original historical and political context, Kepley uncovers how each of them borrowed and organized material from the society in which it was made.

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published in the field—and when Salt's own book has no footnotes at all. In the light of his strident complaints about the lack of scholarly rigor in film studies, both his book and his letter clearly—if unwittingly—reveal his own standards of accuracy.

If Salt responds to this reply, we expect that he will fire back more invective, hint again that he has special evidence up his sleeve, and conveniently forget that the issue he originally raised is not whether we are right or wrong but rather whether we are scrupulous. He will also probably continue to ignore all the things that our book sets out to do that he has apparently never dreamt of—discussing principles of narrative construction and spectatorial activity, showing the systematic nature of classical style, tracing changing modes of film production across Hollywood's history, showing the institutional causes and consequences of technological change, comparing the Hollywood style with other styles, and so on. The usual response to Salt's fulminations has been to compliment him for his genuine accomplishments while clucking one's tongue about his eccentricities. After Salt's irresponsible and unfounded charges, however, we can only suggest that he lift his gaze from his navel to the printed page and actually read what other scholars have written.

—DAVID BORDWELL
AND KRISTIN THOMPSON
15 February 1986

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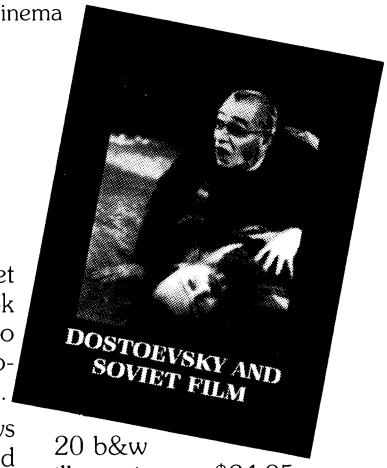

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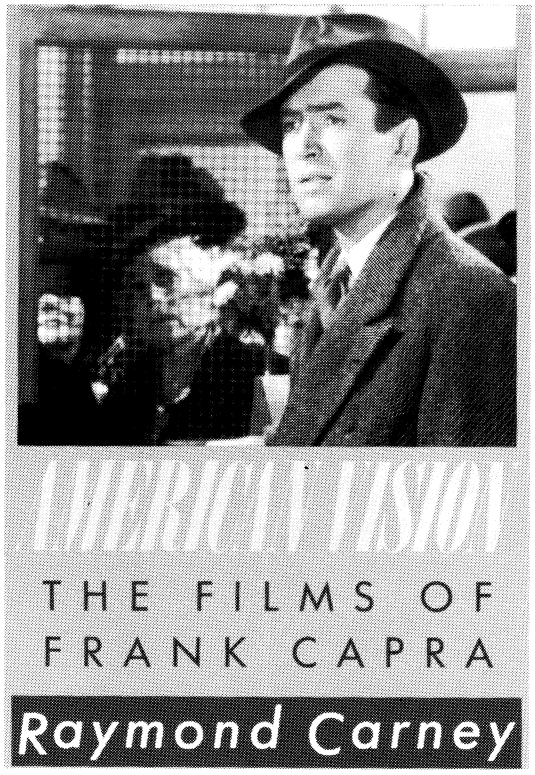

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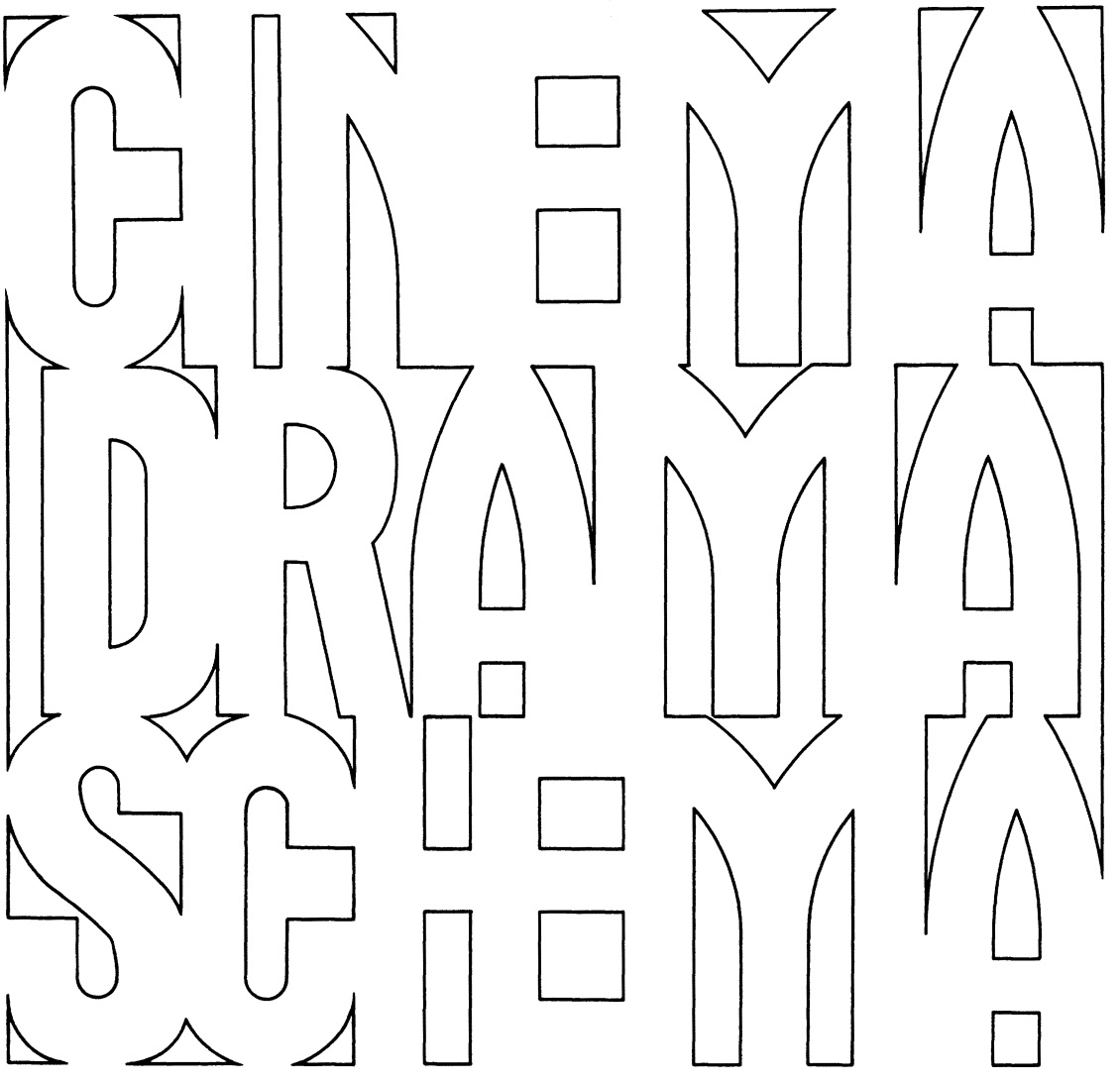

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